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THE THEME OF TRAGIC ISOLATION IN

JOSEPH CONRAD

BY

© MARY NGUAN SZETO

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ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to explore the different facets of loneliness dramatised by Joseph Conrad in his major works. Alienation, social, metaphysical and psychological, is partly the result of a particular intellectual climate, but once brought about, the sense of alienation is hardly to be mitigated. The dilemma of man, put in such an environment, is intense, for he is unable to understand his metaphysical environment, other human beings or even himself. The first chapter examines the romantic outcast, the one who overcomes the dilemma by circumventing; his world is full of imaginary constructs, and he lives by them without too much thought of the nature of his illusions. The skeptics, discussed in Chapter II, penetrate the romantic illusion and disdain it; going to the other extreme, they denounce all action and participation. Chapter III explores psychological isolation, the case where the individual cannot come to terms with his own identity or his own reality. The pessimism suffusing Conrad's works is finally juxtaposed with illusions, which are created to alleviate the sense of tragedy.

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INTRODUCTION

"Who knows what true loneliness is -- not the conventional word, but the naked terror?"¹ asks the staid teacher of languages concerning Razumov in Under Western Eyes. Indeed, many of Conrad's characters, including Razumov, know of this naked terror, the terror experienced by the outcast, the solitary, the hermit and the alien, and Conrad's novels and short stories are full of such characters: men divorced from their environment, physical, social or moral, due to their own volition or to circumstances beyond their control. Then of course, there may be also men divorced from their other selves, "that side of us, which like the other hemisphere of the moon, exists stealthily in perpetual darkness, with only a fearful ashy light falling at times on the edge."² The essential loneliness of man is an early preoccupation with Conrad, beginning with the Malayan novels with their rendering of the crude dreamer in Almayer whose unrealistic material interests finally crumble in his recognition of failure when even the most prized possession of his life, his daughter Nina, leaves him and his impotent dreams for a native prince, Dain. Belonging to this same dramatic world is Willems whose quick descent to the regions of loneliness is initiated by his own weaknesses, that is, his over estimation of his own capability, and accelerated by his passion for Aissa, a native girl who is the direct cause of his betrayal of Lingard, his benefactor and only friend. These early interests of Conrad did not diminish but persist in his later novels in greater intensity. His best known works, for example, deal with the theme of

the isolation of man. In Lord Jim, Jim isolates himself from his environment physically and morally; he tries to get outside of it all and to create a new world for himself which he does in Patusan, and by his unwavering judgement of himself and his efforts to redeem himself in his own eyes, he also creates an individual moral world, and it is indeed in this regard that Jim is to be finally understood. Kurtz of Heart of Darkness is similar to Jim basically, though he is a much more sophisticated creature, but through an enforced loneliness, he projects his own authoritarian inner world into external reality and finds that the result is insufferable. Marlow, the narrator in both these works, sees such solipsistic withdrawal as a vexed question, and while he recognises the inadequacy of the world to deal with persons like Jim and Kurtz, he views private visions with trepidation as they threaten communal existence. In Victory, another aspect of this vexed question is posed: Heyst, like Decoud of Nostromo, makes a deliberate decision early in life to abstain from delving in human affairs. He aims to be that detached onlooker who is to look on the world with disdain and amusement, but his private world is invaded and he is drawn back into the world of activity to find himself incapacitated by the long period of non-activity.

Indeed there are lonely individuals in nearly all of Conrad's works, and the brands of solitariness are as varied as the human race. The stolid captains of ships, however unimaginative they are, suffer from the loneliness of command (for example, Captain MacWhirr), and likewise hesitating young captains who yet have to get a hold on themselves or their imaginations (The Shadow Line, "The Secret Sharer"). Then there are those divorced from reality by history, like José

Avellanos whose political vision is as limiting as his old age, or Viola whose reminiscences of the old Garibaldino days divorce him from a realistic apprehension of the present. Foreigners like Yanko Goorall in "Amy Foster" must suffer because indiscriminate fate had placed Yanko in a strange and hostile environment where he is taken by the natives to be a savage, mentally deranged and physically dangerous. In the sphere of human relationships, the agony of loneliness is also experienced. Many of Conrad's couples are unhappy people, incapable of understanding each other because of various reasons. The Goulds, of course, are separated by the phantom of the San Tomé Mine. Flora and Anthony of Chance too seem incapable of breaking through the psychological barrier for a long time; Antonia for all her intelligence, does not appreciate the real nature of Decoud, while Lena and Heyst struggle for a harmony that seems to elude them. Perhaps the most powerful dramatization of this inability to understand the mate is found in The Secret Agent. Winnie's placidity, her obedience, her anxiousness to please her husband, spring not from a genuine love but from a sense of preservation while Verloc, the obese indolent, has no inkling at all of her true feelings, her great maternal instinct for the brother Stephen. The most powerful episode is the murder scene where the manner of Stevie's death is revealed. To Verloc, it was part of a greater fatality, something to do with the success of his espionage activities and his own personal fate. While he rattles on before Winnie about the "venomous beast" of the Embassy who had threatened him, about their future plans, Winnie's sense of disorientation (she considers herself free at last) envelops her, paralyzing her, for she has lost her reason for living, finally mobilizing

her to plunge a carving knife into the man who, she persistently reflects, has led Stevie away to murder him. Potent irony spices the tragedy, for Winnie and Verloc have never really been close, and the silence between them, hitherto mistaken for intimacy, is shattered at last, and yet, even in death, Verloc is no wiser regarding Winnie's psychology and state of mind.

It should be clear from the preceding paragraphs that the theme of isolation is a major one in Conrad's works. For analytical purposes, Conrad's isolated characters can be placed in different categories and I have arbitrarily done this for the more important novels, leaving the minor characters and types of isolatoes for a mere cursory glance. The difficulties and limitations of categorization will be recognized, but for purposes of efficiency, one can discern three major types of isolatoes in Conrad. First, there is the romantic outcast, the man, who by his conception of an ideal self cuts himself from the rest of mankind. My study of the romantic hero will be concentrated on Jim and Kurtz, both of whom are basically and potentially romantic. Jim's idle hours, since maturity, have been spent in anticipation of crises, in which he sees himself as the fearless one, ready to battle against all odds and to emerge heroic in his own eyes and in the estimation of the world. The whole drama of Jim's life, his escape from a fact and later his efforts and position in Patusan, indeed his whole conduct, is based on the reality of his dream. The officers at the inquiry of the Patna case want facts, but to Jim, the facts are not important; it is rather how one measures up against the ideals. Finally, for Jim, as for Kurtz, the external objective world of facts does not matter as much as his own vision,

and this of course alienates him from a society ruled by objective facts, more interested in the how than the why.

Contrasting the romantic isolato is the skeptical solitary like Heyst. He does not believe in an individual world or individual morality or that man is capable of heroism or the alternative, degeneration. Heyst is skeptical of all human conduct, as he fears that any action, however neutral in intent, might produce evil consequences. His deliberate detachment from the world is a direct consequence of it, and in the same vein, he denigrates his compassion for Morrison and Lena. Lena senses his contempt for action when she asks, "You saved a man for fun -- is that what you mean? Just for fun?"³ Unlike the romantic hero who sees something perfect to strive for, an ideal of conduct, the skeptic has a negative attitude, one which takes nothing into account, for after all, "Man on this earth is an unforeseen accident which does not stand close investigation."⁴ This is the void Decoud has to confront on the Great Isabel. If all is nothing, where does the individual fit in? What does one do in an incomprehensible universe where action leads to evil? It is better to be exterminated altogether than to exist on such terms. The portrayal of both the romantic and skeptic reveals a rather startling vision of the universe, which is the impotence of external reality. Spiritually and morally, these men are divorced from their environment which no longer provides the absolute, external point of reference. These are transplanted and uprooted men who are aliens in their own world. They are disoriented, and they must either create a surrogate internal world or be content to exist on the fringe of this chaotic one. In either case, existence is not fully desirable, unless one can be blind to the tragic vision.

A third category of isolatoes which interests Conrad does not deal with man and his relation with the environment but rather with man and himself. It dramatizes a man coming to terms with himself, like the captain in "The Secret Sharer" or the young captain of The Shadow Line, and on a more symbolic basis, the crew in the Nigger of the "Narcissus". The secret self of the individual, the demon which makes Jim jump, Nostromo steal the silver, the captain become an accomplice of a murder is interesting psychologically -- akin to Dostoevsky's "double" and Jung's "shadow" -- the feared self which shows up at unexpected times. Wrestling with himself as the captain in "The Secret Sharer" does, the individual perforce must insulate himself from everything -- the world within is so important that he cannot even have a full grip on the external. These psychological isolatoes are important too and contribute to a fuller understanding of Conrad's pessimism. Man cannot fully rely on himself as a reference point, for even his own personality eludes him at the moment of crisis, and besides, the power inherent in the darker, hidden side of man seems unpredictable and dangerous.

Pessimism and skepticism suffuse the portrayal of the isolated individual in Conrad's works. There is a fundamental pessimism, a sense of fatality enveloping his characters, originating from a recognition that external reality is either meaningless or indifferent from the vantage point of the individual. As Conrad puts it, the world is "but a vain and floating appearance."⁵ The elusive quality of existence so frustrates Conrad that his characters reflect this frustration, for they are not happy human beings, and they must compromise in order to keep sane. The conundrum of existence is also

a vision of life, taking shape in man's sensibility. Consciousness, the ability to perceive, is thus of utmost importance, as it enables one to see, though not to comprehend, our tragedy, for as Conrad says, "as soon as you know of your slavery, the pain, the anger, the strife, -- the tragedy begins."⁶ Since we cannot live in oblivion, we are conscious of tragedy, something utterly beyond man's control. Hence the irony and tragedy of those who would seek to exalt themselves above other men, to work themselves into super heroes through a belief in their own integrity and reality. Is theirs not a case of self-deception, of escape from the vision of horror? Conrad compounds the cosmic tragedy (alienation of man from the universe) with a personal tragedy, for the fruits of self-knowledge are just as unpalatable. Razumov, Jim, Kurtz all have a glimpse of themselves and what they see differs not in substance but in degree of repulsiveness. Conrad's world is populated by a host of unhappy men and women, people who have failed others and themselves and have to live with the moral consequences. Of course, there are Gentleman Brown and envoys of evil like Mr. Jones and Ricardo whose villainy and natural inclination to create havoc exempt them from soul testing and the sense of tragedy. It is those upright promising men who have the substance of the hero that must fail, even in spite of themselves.

Conrad's vision is suffocating and thoroughly depressing when apprehended intellectually. Man in such a vision is trapped, suspended from nowhere, for he is severed from his external environment as well as from himself. If that was all, it would be nothingness. Conrad is far from being a nihilist, and though at times he dangerously approaches the edge, at other instances he can assume a

peculiarly cheerful aspect. Conrad's philosophic stance, examined more carefully, reveals a basic inconsistency, as his pessimistic view of life is somewhat alleviated or undermined by his tenuous hold on traditional values. He is a faithful exponent of the seaman's code, which makes work a great virtue and fidelity to one's companions imperative. It is difficult not to take Conrad's numerous statements on fidelity with a few grains of salt as they blatantly contradict the works of his more profound imagination. Moreover, when the tenet of fidelity is examined in the wider context of betrayal, interesting things come to light. Conrad deals severely with the traitor, for example, Razumov, but it is not because he senses that infidelity is morally wrong according to some traditional moral code, but because betrayal is interesting in relation to man's knowledge of himself.

While it is possible to dismiss the oversimplified traditional tenets, it is not so easy to deal with Conrad's positive value which he terms the solidarity of mankind. His most explicit statement about this is contained in the preface to the Nigger of the "Narcissus" where he says that the artist must speak to "the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation -- and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts."⁷ This statement is in direct contradiction to some of the things he says elsewhere and also to the drama of loneliness presented in his novels. However, in his creative work, he does present the solidarity of mankind as an alternative to the solitariness of the individual, though the alternative is fraught with imperfections and pitfalls. A few examples from his major novels amply illustrate the point. Marlow consistently thinks, of Jim, "he is one of us" and

hence arises the possibility of understanding and empathy. In his relationship with Kurtz, too, Marlow is always identifying with him, finally emerging as the protector of his memory. The tragedy of Razumov, his sufferings, his anguish spring from his essential aloneness, his inability to identify with any one; he is unfortunate in not having a Marlow. Yet, in each of these novels mentioned, the individual does not rest on the comfortable cushion of human solidarity but is impelled by some inner force to abjure human company, physically, morally, or psychologically so that Marlow can only share part of the vision of Jim and Kurtz, each of whom leaves his own society, one for greater heroism and self-fulfillment and the other for the horror of recognition. In both cases, tragedy is inevitable, but the self-imposed isolation is more sincere and more dramatic and moving than a return to the fellowship of mankind which in these cases would be impossible anyway. It is clear that Marlow is not imposing a moral ethical world on his characters, and yet the whole issue is ambiguous in so far as both positions are there. The fact that Conrad writes his novels employing often a narrator through whose sensibilities we apprehend the characters makes it difficult to pin Conrad down, for we can never really distinguish the creator from the created. And yet as Conrad himself professes, an artist never fails to leave his stamp on his works: "every novel contains an element of autobiography -- and this can hardly be denied, since the creator can only express himself in his creation . . ."⁸

I have emphasized the pessimism in Conrad's works, but this ambiguity enables one to take another point of view in regard to the theme of isolation. Some critics have argued that individuals like

Kurtz and Heyst suffer their fate "for their presumptuous flouting of the solidarity of mankind,"⁹ thus making retribution significant, and assuming that communal morality does exist. Adam Gillon in The Eternal Solitary has also expressed this idea; the isolato therefore is also a transgressor, he breaks the law and is left in a moral desert, doomed to perdition, for says Gillon, "Man cannot live without a world of other men and their activity."¹⁰ Though it is possible to take this moral view, I think it an over-simplification. One inclines to disbelieve these critics for the simple reason that Conrad is sympathetic to his tragic figures. The tragedy of the individual is potent in a way that it is rich in drama and human interest, and that does not suggest the arbitrary imposition of a moral code. It is more accurate then to see this ambiguity not as a contradiction but as a tension between profound skepticism, which undermines all and threatens to annihilate all, and faith in traditional ethics, which may be so well-drilled into a person that it is impossible to emotionally deny its existence. It is my intention to explore and examine this vision, the components of it, and the tension which accompanies it in representative works.

CHAPTER I

THE ROMANTIC OUTCAST

The issue of man's plight in the world is examined with some intensity in Lord Jim, a novel most suitable to our study of the romantic outcast, who, as Marlow puts it, belongs to the "army of waifs and strays that marches down into the gutters of the earth."¹ This wanderer, outcast or hermit has the problem of adjusting to his environment, a process fraught with difficulties because his concept of reality is fundamentally inimical to an authoritarian external order, call it the universe, fate or what you will. In our examination of Lord Jim we find that two levels of externally imposed order, the universal scheme of things and its human counterpart, society, are questioned, the one (society) more so than the other. Fate or the mysterious working of the universe broods in the background, and Jim has to take that into account. In fact, he would like to attribute the jump from the "Patna," which shatters his whole world, to some divine bedevilment. Jim felt "as though he had not acted but had suffered himself to be handled by the infernal powers who had selected him for the victim of their practical joke" (80). The sense of inexorable fate, determining man's destiny so much so that human will and effort are of no avail, is in a few cases expressed by Marlow himself, a reaction perhaps to Jim's overwhelming egoism. When Jim ruminates over his chance of heroism missed and hopes for a "clean slate" to begin all over again, Marlow comments aside in his superior

wisdom: "A clean slate, did he say? As if the initial word of each our destiny were not graven in imperishable characters upon the face of a rock" (136). If Marlow believes in what he says, then Jim's actions after the Patna affair are seriously undermined and upon reflection appear comic and ironical. For if all has been determined, then Jim, having failed, cannot by sheer effort of will shape his life again according to his own ego-ideal. Indeed, Marlow seems initially to view Jim's joy on the eve of the Patusan adventure with impatience: "Why hurl defiance at the universe?" (173)

However, for all these explicit references and other vaguer ones, the mysteries of fate are not of prime interest in the novel. The references here and there perhaps complicate the issue in so far as they ^{add} ~~throw~~ yet another dimension to Jim's case. But the ironies of fate which cause havoc in the life of a Oedipus or a Macbeth are not present in the same form if at all in Lord Jim. Our further study of the novel will show that the major concern is not with this aspect of external order but with a more concrete kind, namely, society with all its laws and policemen, regulating conduct, and demanding a certain standard of behaviour in return for its munificence, the sense of belonging, deemed so essential for human existence. Society, in this case, European society, is narrowed down to an even smaller order, the community of seamen, a sub-group functioning in harmony within the total culture. Nonetheless, it is society, and as such an external order, which, to facilitate the greatest efficiency, must be simplistic and severe. In general, it must give clear-cut laws and rulings based on facts, the things apparent on the surface. It is inevitable then that the individual will clash with society if he refuses to have

judgement passed on him based on a few facts. Society is not interested in the "fundamental why"; it is more interested in the consequences of one's actions. Jim resents this at the enquiry: "They wanted facts. Facts! They demanded facts from him, as if facts could explain anything!" (21) Indeed it is a fact oriented society, and because the facts of the Patna affair are so scandalizing, Jim is doomed forever in the estimation of men. The antagonism between the individual and society is explored rather fully, and one result is the view that organization, society, is essentially inimical to the individual. The sympathy for Jim expressed by Marlow, the general tone and the structure of the novel reveal that the interest in the drama of the individual comes from the tension between his complexity and the simplicity of the mould society casts for him. This is where Marlow especially comes in, for while the majority of the clan, with notable exceptions, spurn Jim for what he has done, Marlow is perceptive enough to see that there is more to it than the facts, and in seeking a more profound understanding, he creates for us a very complex and complicated affair, presenting us with glimpses of an individual whose ego-ideal dooms him to isolation but also to greater self-fulfillment. In sharing with us his glimpses into the "vast enigma", that is, the personality of Jim, he is also indirectly investigating the relationship of the romantic with his environment and the individual's sense of reality society acknowledges.

It must be stated clearly at the outset that two kinds of society are presented in Lord Jim; the first is the institution like society, an organization formed of necessity to which everybody automatically belongs and which is abstract and impersonal since it

is concerned mostly with the semblance of order and a superficial understanding of its members. The inadequacy of this society in dealing with the dilemma of an individual is clearly illustrated throughout the novel but especially at the enquiry. It is true that the facts lump Jim with the imbeciles, the obese captain and his spineless engineers, three repulsive individuals, for he had jumped, like them, into a life-boat when it appeared that the ship carrying eight hundred Muslim pilgrims was sinking. The old ship, however, held out, to be towed to safety by a French gun-boat, and this incident unleashes all the incredulity, surprise and horror among the worthy seamen to whom professional decency is the first rule of conduct. The fact is that Jim had joined the infamous trio unexpectedly, much to his own surprise, for he had not intended doing it, and had stayed aloof while they were frantically trying to lower a boat to save their precious souls. After it had all happened, he still could not believe he had done it, for he characteristically perceives himself different, "he was altogether of another sort" (59), "a gentleman" (96), and did he not have his dreams of grandeur? He is later to present his case to Marlow to try to justify himself, to blame others, to offer excuses, but at the enquiry, they want facts and the judgement passed is cold and impersonal, taking no account of his dreams: he, and the others, in absentia, were reprimanded for "abandoning in the moment of danger the lives and property confided to their charge . . ." (118) in consequence of which offence his certificate was cancelled. This is the judgement passed on him, the stigma of failure that is to haunt him for the rest of his life, to crop up again and again, even in paradisaical Patusan. He has broken the code and thus been made an outcast and for this injustice

(in Jim's eyes, they have not given him a fair hearing, have not bothered about the circumstances nor his state of mind), he must give up a promising sea career. "He is no earthly good for anything" says Chester (123), himself an indiscriminating unscrupulous adventurer. Later as a clerk Jim is met with more of such opinions, reaffirmations of the Court of Enquiry. The fact follows him all over South East Asia and generally the verdict is: "It's no laughing matter. It's a disgrace to human nature" -- that's what it is. I would despise being seen in the same room with one of those men. Yes, sir!" (141).

With the world thus turned against him, Jim feels suffocated, and no wonder, for it is a heavy price to pay for an unmeditated act. He is then victim even to the second engineer of the Patna who survives to regard him as a brother, and the butt of ridicule to any drunk (145) and this, coupled with a sense of injustice makes life intolerable. By society's standards, he has failed and that is the end of that. But not for Conrad, since the action must be placed in a host of individual perspectives as one character after another offer his judgement. The testimony of the Malay helmsmen damns him since they had doggedly stuck to their duty because there had been no order, and the French lieutenant who had remained on the Patna while it was towed to safety had not panicked but had faced the danger as a matter of course. He understood Jim's fear, he said, but as for himself, "' . . . The honour . . . that is real -- that is! And what life may be worth when the honour is gone -- . . . -- I can offer no opinion. I can offer no opinion -- because -- Monsieur -- I know nothing of it!" (109) Indeed, the French lieutenant shows an understanding of Jim's case -- he attributes Jim's action to a momentary fear or cowardice -- and this

is very much society's view of human conduct, but it is inadequate in that it fails to accord proper weight to the weakness of men. Thus, Jim's father, the parson, living in his comfortable niche in England, could never be expected to understand why Jim failed to do his duty, which after all is a simple matter in the world of sheltered man.

These various examples show that Jim's sense of guilt, which motivates him to wait for another opportunity to prove himself, is not wholly an individual matter, to be indulged or ignored. Society has cut him off so entirely that if he does not make something of himself he will become the man society thinks him to be. True enough, not all are ready to condemn him, and even among the ordinary ranks, there are some ready to forget as Egström, Jim's one-time employer, is: "'And who the devil cares about that?'" (143) But there is always the stigma, and Jim can never again be fully trusted. Conrad has to dramatise the idea that society is incapable of dealing with cases such as Jim's in order to bring out the idea of another kind of society, the brotherhood of men.

Marlow is of course the exponent of this brotherhood whose members seem to be linked by a kinship, an affinity which is felt rather than defined. There is perhaps this sense of affinity which prompts Marlow to approach Jim when he recognises the younger man as "one of us." His initial curiosity about Jim springs from such a recognition; to Marlow he looks decent, belonging to the kind of people "whose very existence is based upon honest faith, and upon the instinct of courage. . . . I mean just that inborn ability to look temptations straight in the face -- a readiness unintellectual enough, . . . , but without pose -- . . . an unthinking and blessed stiffness before the

outward and the inward terrors, before the might of nature, and the seductive corruption of men --" (32) Jim also looks like "that good, stupid kind" (33), and Marlow's sympathy goes out to him immediately on this identification. His involvement shows his perceptiveness and sensitivity, for he is able almost immediately to sense Jim's problem, and he soon comes to regard Jim as a younger brother gone astray. His interest in Jim's psychology is a projection of interest in his own, for he feels that his own integrity is being questioned and so, right from the start, he is eager to exonerate Jim, to find some "redeeming cause, some merciful explanation, some convincing shadow of an excuse" (37). Jim's crime seems to pose a threat to Marlow who identifies with the younger man so completely that he almost feels that a part of him is being brought under cross examination:

Was it for my own sake that I wished to find some shadow of an excuse for that young fellow whom I have never seen before, but whose appearance alone added a touch of personal concern to the thoughts suggested by the knowledge of his weakness -- made it a thing of mystery and terror -- like a hint of a destructive fate ready for us all whose youth -- in its day -- has resembled his youth? (38)

While Marlow is the one who expresses this brotherhood (and his sensitivity to the issue is such that the reader is willing to believe a brotherhood exists), there is the problem of defining the exact nature of this community. It is some kind of psychic identification, for Jim reminds Marlow of his younger days, just as he makes Brierly, the model seaman, question his own soul. Marlow calls this community simply "the solidarity of the craft" (96) from which we derive the steadfastness to withstand the "Dark Powers" (89). For Marlow then, it is a matter ^{of} hanging together for mutual support: "Woe

to the stragglers! We exist only in so far as we hang together" (164). These various quotations show Marlow vitally interested in the community of decent seamen bound together by the sense of loyalty, an "honest faith" and "instinct of courage," as distinguished from the other lot, the villains. This community is based on the link of professional decency plus a human concern, but as a sub-group, it assimilates the main tenets of the general society. Thus Marlow is not in conflict with his society; he is in fact an effective proponent of it. He is therefore inevitably ethical, and conventionally so, as he is a product of that society that objects to Jim's cowardice. His ethical sense approves of Jim's clean appearance, his basic honesty, his straightforwardness and sense of responsibility in staying for the enquiry while the rest cleared out. Marlow's brotherhood is an interpretation of the ideals of the larger society put into practice and it distils the noblest aspirations of that society just as it tries to evoke the best from the individuals belonging to that society. The interesting point is to discover whether Jim is truly "one of us" in his basic orientation, his attitude to life.

In appearance Jim is undoubtedly a potential member and he is ethical too by his upbringing, but adherence to a professional ideal is not the main purport of his life. He is guided more by his egoism, an egoism attributable to the romanticism of youth but which is the most potent force for Jim. The essential difference between Jim and Marlow is ^{that} while the one regards society -- the solidarity of the craft -- as essential for existence and hence embraces its ethics without question, the other makes himself the centre of his world and virtues and ethics are just incidental to him. That is why Jim is a dreamy fellow whose constructs in his illusory world are so real that he finds

himself caught unawares in the mundane world. For him, life is a matter of being true to ~~his~~ imaginary constructs:

They were the best parts of life, its secret truth, its hidden reality. They had a gorgeous virility, the charm of vagueness, they passed before him with a heroic tread; they carried his soul away with them and made it drunk with the divine philtre of an unbounded confidence in itself. There was nothing he could not face. (15)

Jim's problem is how to reconcile this world with the hard world of facts and his orientation is such that he is ultimately responsible for himself. Marlow's sympathy is useful to him in helping him face his ghost; Jim feels the compulsion to implicate another person, to make him an accomplice, to make it all easier to bear, for he is human after all, but Marlow cannot offer Jim refuge, protection or the chance for rehabilitation within the brotherhood. Jim must be an exile from all until he finds the opportunity again to re-erect those imaginary constructs, the ego-ideals. As the supreme egoist, Jim is not to be reached, and Marlow, in a moment of desperation, cries: "It is as if loneliness were a hard and absolute condition of existence; the envelope of flesh and blood on which our eyes are fixed melts before the outstretched hand, and there remains only the capricious, unsolvable, and elusive spirit no eye can follow, no hand can grasp" (132).

The central issue of the novel, then, is the personality of Jim, and it is by no means easy to have a full grasp on this because the novel does not give a conclusive judgement on him. The complex figure which emerges is partly the result of Marlow's method of narration, for he goes in circles around Jim, to come back again and again to this enigma, and he is careful too to present many valid views on this individual. He himself is making sure, but he never makes an

unequivocal judgement, and his own uncertainty casts a mysterious hue on Jim. He refers to Jim's problem as "some mysterious, inexplicable, impalpable striving of his wounded spirit" (134) and the imagery of fog and mists is often used in connection with him:

The view he let me have of himself were like those glimpses through the shifting rents in a thick fog -- bits of vivid and vanishing detail, giving no connected idea of the general aspect of a country. (56)

It was one of those bizarre and exciting glimpses through the fog. (84)

I saw him moving, big, big -- as you see a man in a mist, in a dream. (88)

And even as I looked at him the mists rolled into the rent, and his voice spoke: (95)

No wonder the reader is perplexed! But though Jim is a sensitive spirit (had he been of a coarser spirit he would not have taken the Patna affair so much to heart), he has the tenacity to hold on to one particular line of thought. An important issue, since Marlow leaves it open, is to decide if Jim really is as heroic as he makes himself out to be, or whether he is really a coward who will not accept the fact, and who being afraid to face life, buries himself in a remote place away from civilization there to betray once more the people who have put their trust in him. Whatever Jim is, by Marlow's presentation, he is indeed "at the heart of a vast enigma" (247). This white-clad figure with the veiled opportunity by his side is fulfilled perhaps in his own terms finally. Facing death, "he had beheld the face of that opportunity which, like an Eastern bride, had come veiled to his side" (306). Whatever his life may have meant, Marlow recognises that by his death, Jim "goes away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless

wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct" (307). He is here baldly making the statement that Jim has died for his romantic dream, has turned illusion into reality. It is victory over the dark powers which had tried to subjugate him once.

It is useful then to view Jim as a romantic to arrive at a better understanding of his essential antagonism to the external world, his assertion of his own reality over and above the reality of others. Stein gives his professional diagnosis when he calls Jim a romantic. Man, says Stein, is never content to sit on the heap of mud and keep still: "'He wants to be a saint, and he wants to be a devil -- and every time he shuts his eyes he sees himself as a very fine fellow -- so fine as he can never be . . . In a dream . . .'" (155) The romantic therefore has an ideal conception of himself and his problem is how to live up to this ideal. Stein thinks that existence is a matter of "how to be" because man cannot shut his eyes all the time and dream, and alternately, "'it is not good for you to find you cannot make your dream come true, for the reason that you not strong enough are, or not ^{clever} ~~good~~ enough'" (156). Then Stein gives his advice to the romantic in a rather ambiguous passage:

. . . A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns -- nicht wahr? . . . No! I tell you! The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up. (156)

Stein is saying here that since we refuse to admit our own failings in that we want to be saints, it is best that we create dreams or illusions to live by. In fact, it is the inevitability of life that the illusion we create will be our reality, as we are born to fall

into the sea (imagination). If we do not create illusions or live in our dreams, we drown (because we cannot face harsh reality). So we are to follow the dream which is equated with immersing ourselves in the "destructive elements." It is clear then that there is hardly any choice, as both ways lead to destruction, and thus Stein suggests that it is a matter of accommodation, a problem of "how to be", or how to make the best of a bad situation, or how to live one's life in the face of the absurdity of existence. The romantic then creates his dream which for him is his reality and he hears the mesmerizing call, "To follow the dream, and again to follow the dream" (157), a trance-like, magical call to self-destruction. Buoying oneself up by a construct of the mind, is, however, as Stein sees it, essentially an escape from self-knowledge and by implication may involve a greater tragedy. In this scheme of things, there is darkness all round.

Jim is such a romantic that he transforms what is potentially tragic into a glorious act. He is labelled a dreamer in the novel, a man more prone to reveries than to action. He is so much dreamer as to make one doubt whether he has the qualities to become the man he would like to be. His failure on the Patna has been foreshadowed by his failure to act as a trainee seaman when he was paralysed instead of being mobilized by an emergency. Since that event has no great consequences except as a chance missed for Jim, he can bury it safely in his memory, but for the reader, it provides the material to understand the moments before that fateful jump. As he himself relates it, he was paralysed because he could imagine the panic that would result if the eight hundred members of humanity were alerted to the danger; indeed, he could imagine it to "the very last harrowing detail" (63)

and was petrified. One could say that his "forestalling vision" (78), his fecund imagination was his undoing, but it is interesting that Marlow should remark that he suspected Jim "wanted to die without added terrors, quietly, in a sort of peaceful trance" (65) and though Marlow goes on to say that "this extreme weariness of emotions, the vanity of effort, the yearning for rest"⁽⁶⁵⁾ is not an uncommon feeling among seamen, one knows that he is analysing Jim here and intimating that Jim is basically afraid of action; his courage is a kind of passivity which keeps him on the alert for six hours on the defensive (90). It is also significant that before the disaster, Jim had been so soothed by the quiet night that he had indulged himself in reveries, dreaming of heroic exploits, and yet when the challenge really came, he was overwhelmed. Of course, he has many excuses: he had been caught unawares, and the challenge came too stealthily, without the clamour, the announcement that he expected, for after all, had he not always anticipated and longed for danger? Marlow is more than once shocked by Jim's attitude which is basically "subtle" and unsound as he makes so very much of his dream. The reality of his inner world is presented again and again -- the world which for Jim is more real:

I [Marlow] could see in his glance darted into the night all his inner being carried on, projected headlong into the fanciful realm of recklessly heroic aspirations. . . . He was very far away from me who watched him across three feet of space. With every instant he was penetrating deeper into the impossible world of romantic achievements. He got to the heart of it at last! A strange look of beatitude overspread his features, his eyes sparkled in the light of the candle burning between us; he positively smiled! He had penetrated to the very heart -- to the very heart. (62)

Up to the traumatic episode of the Patna, Jim had existed in the world of his imagination and hence, separated from his environ-

ment and fellow creatures. The initial stages of his decline have already begun in his taking of an easy berth on the Patna and his association with "them" rather than with "us." The impact of the Patna affair is to make Jim question himself, to even doubt himself which amounts to the destruction of his dream world. In the agonizing moments of confession before Marlow, Jim vacillates between truth and untruth, terribly reluctant to admit fear or cowardice but gnawed by a writhing sense of guilt. He wants to free himself from the gnawing doubts by involving Marlow, challenging him, trying to obtain his absolution, but realizing at the same time that it is all useless. Marlow, too, understands the essential quality of the romantic vision when he says that his absolution and his opinion will not alter anything as far as Jim is concerned: "This was one of those cases which no solemn deception can palliate, which no man can help; where his very Maker seems to abandon a sinner to his own devices" (71). That is why he presents Jim's case in a sympathetic manner, for Jim is trying to come to terms with himself. It is significant that the Patna affair is morally inconclusive; the reader shares Jim's doubts though he is aware that the circumstances were such that Jim could be excused. There is enough evidence to show that he acted true to his conscience and principles. He insists, for example, that he was not thinking of himself at the last moments but of the teeming pilgrims (62), and he had not intended to save himself but that he felt he could not do anything at all. One important opinion expressed by Marlow weighs the issue in Jim's favour, for Marlow says, " . . . had I been there I would not have given as much as a counterfeit farthing for the ship's chance to keep above water to the end of each successive second" (72). And when we try to

reconstruct the circumstances, we can agree with Jim that he had been shamelessly tried. He was expecting the ship to go the next moment, and the moment stretched to twenty-seven minutes which he spent cursing the ship and watching the skipper and his henchmen enact a burlesque. It was a long time to wait for death and he was morally alone (for his intentions were so different from theirs). Thus, in the confusion he had jumped and it is understandable if he had had a momentary fear. However, in spite of the extenuating circumstances, Jim cannot face the possibility of weakness in his character; the romantic cannot afford the luxury of self-doubt. He therefore makes excuses for himself. He blames it on the others: "It was their doing plainly as if they had reached up with a boat-hook and pulled me over" (91). The whole thing was "A joke hatched in hell" (80) And besides he was not conscious when he jumped. In other words, he is loathe to be responsible for an action which he had not consciously contemplated doing: "Isn't it awful a man should be driven to do a thing like that -- and be responsible?" (88) He cannot come to a moral decision about it because he judges the act by conscious motives, for those, to him, are his tenets of existence. He had been shocked immediately by his own action, had wanted to swim back to the very spot (where the ship was believed to have sunk) and he had even contemplated suicide. So he tries desperately to believe that "there was not the thickness of a sheet of paper between the right and wrong of this affair" (95).

One thing that emerges clearly from Jim's debate with his soul is that he employs subterfuges to escape from complete self-knowledge because the personality revealed by that incident is too grossly incompatible with his vision of himself. An admission of his

guilt will take from him the very ground of his existence. It will also identify him with the baser counterpart of humanity which he is eager to disown. He very emphatically and repeatedly states that he is not one of them (skipper and company) that he would put the whole world between himself and them. Though he consciously despises them, he is involved first as their first-mate and second as a fellow cast-away. He denies self-knowledge and yet ironically he says he would live with the truth: "I know the truth, and I would live it down -- alone, with myself" (97). Does he know the truth or is it conjured up as the voices which he imagined he heard, (the cries of the pilgrims)? He emerges from the enquiry with his soul intact; in a way he rejects this phantom and all he wants is to start anew as he feels invulnerable: "I feel as if nothing could ever touch me" (132). Having discovered something about himself, he will not accept it. Marlow does not condemn him for this, for "no man ever understands quite his own^{artful} dodges to escape from the grim shadow of self-knowledge" (59). Jim is intensely sincere but it is the "essential sincerity of falsehood" (69). The problem is that Jim presumes control over his whole personality, including his natural instincts which might play havoc, might disrupt all conscious plans as they did. By denying the power of the impulse, Jim, many psychiatrists would say, is leading a partial existence, as he is not allowing for a balance of personality. Of course, Jim's attitude is a very arrogant one in that he thinks he can consciously shape and control his destiny and the implications of this fascinate Marlow as he is being made "to comprehend the Inconceivable" (69). Marlow goes even farther to say that Jim is symbolic and that "the mystery of his attitude got hold of me as though he had been an

individual in the forefront of his kind, as if the obscure truth involved were momentous enough to affect mankind's conception of itself . . ." (69).

The statement sounds like one of Marlow's over-generalizations, but it is not really. What he is astonished at is Jim's overwhelming self-assurance concerning his moral identity, something which proceeds from his "sublimated, idealized selfishness" (130). At one point he admits that it is Jim who has the light -- the light of innocence, for he is not skeptical enough about himself. Indeed, throughout the novel, Jim's simplicity and child-likeness are emphasized: his vision is an innocent one, Cornelius calls him a child, Marlow says that the whole thing is complicated by his simplicity. This vision of innocence requires a faith which Jim possesses until the Patna when he is thrown into the "everlasting deep hole," but he tries to recreate it, to recover his innocence, to turn a blind eye to the dark powers within himself. It is ironical that he should recognise the external dark powers to which he attributes both his failings, but never admit that they might be inside him, and that he is responsible for both his success and his failure. Marlow has a glimpse of this romantic vision, is thrilled by it because it is a vision of youth and feels that it goes beyond Jim to have a broader significance and that for all its fascination it is different from his own vision. He accepts that Jim is a romantic although he himself is antagonistic to the romantic vision: this conflict shows itself in his irritation with Jim on the eve of the Patusan adventure, " . . . I perceived myself unexpectedly to be thoroughly sick of him. Why these vaporings?" (173) He does not understand the excitement of the potential outcast and he weighs in his

own mind the moral implications of the romantic position.

The moral implications are serious, for the romantic view undermines Marlow's communal world and exalts the individual world, just as it denies external reality in favour of inner reality. This view of existence Marlow consciously eschews and yet he can see the universal significance of such a position. He does not approve of Jim alienating himself from everything, isolating himself in Patusan and yet he can see no alternative to that either. Jim in Patusan is living out a dream, the supreme achievement of his existence, for though he is an outcast in that he is far away from his own kind and can never hope to be understood by his Malay friends or even by Jewel, he enjoys self-fulfillment. He is well satisfied with his position as a demi-god, a position won by valour, and he is loved, revered as a man of courage and unerring judgement; in fact, he is becoming a legend in his lifetime. Now he can boast that nothing can touch him, he is safe, out of the sphere of menacing forces (or so he thinks), a master of his own fate. He is an owner, a possessor and not one of the dispossessed: "He looked with an owner's eye at the peace of the evening, at the river, at the houses, at the everlasting life of the forests, . . ." (182).

His tremendous arrogance can now get a release -- he is supreme and master of his surroundings -- his most exalted dream come true. He is no longer a doubting romantic, since he has found himself, proved to himself his own integrity and assumed all responsibility with placidity by taking all on his own head. What greater heights could he aspire to? Marlow sees the fulfillment of the dream and sees the symbolic significance of Jim: "He dominated the forest, the

secular gloom, the old mankind. He was like a figure set up on a pedestal, to represent in his persistent youth the power, and perhaps the virtues, of races that never grow old, that have emerged from the gloom" (194).

No wonder Jim seems less than real and Patusan for Marlow is to remain hazy and vague. The strangeness, mystery and exoticism of Patusan are all calculated to give a sense of the unreal, and indeed the existence of Patusan is unreal in that it cuts Jim off from the rest of the world. Patusan therefore in this sense can be viewed as the making concrete of a dream, which for all its concreteness, retains the qualities of a dream. It exists in its own concrete reality, but within the context of the novel, it is real only in so far that it is real for Jim, because it remains unknown and hence unreal to the rest of his community. In other words, Jim has willed its existence so that he can continue to exist in his dream, in "total and utter isolation," and "This isolation seemed only the effect of his power" (199). Jim retreats into Patusan to follow his dream, a reality he has created, though this reality is not shared by anyone else. It is, as Marlow puts it, the reality of the sun versus the shadows of the moon, for the light of the moon "gives a sinister reality to shadows alone" (180), sinister, that is, to Marlow the outsider. Jim then has heeded Stein's advice, has followed the dream to its extremity, and is well satisfied with his fate, nearly. By making Patusan his whole world he is being true, for "Of all mankind Jim had no dealings but with himself, . . ." (249). He is therefore also consistent in his death which perhaps is the climax for it enables him to defy all to be true to his ideal of conduct. The opportunity has come for him to prove himself, to show

that he has limitless courage and that he can take all on his own head: "For it may very well be that in the short moment of his last proud and unflinching glance, he had beheld the face of that opportunity which, like an Eastern bride, had come veiled to his side" (306).

An observer who does not share with Jim the romantic vision could say that Jim is deluded from beginning to end. His illusion demands that he make himself superhuman, take himself so seriously that he identifies himself with the object of his dream. Jim's vision is distorted in this sense and it takes Gentleman Brown to jog his memory, to remind him that at one time, he was insidiously identified with that disreputable group. Once again he refuses to come to terms with himself, to recognize Brown for what he is, and instead becomes a morally cringing victim. He does not want to take any positive action against Brown, he just wishes him out of sight just as he refuses to confront his weaker self, firm in the belief that nothing can touch him. His betrayal of his friends is therefore true to character, and he goes to his death oblivious of the blunder he has made. He sadly lacks self-knowledge, and yet as the novel portrays him, he has the potential of a hero and this is so because of his ethical orientation which clouds the issue because his is an essentially amoral position.

Jim is ethical and has a romantic conscience which makes him a decent sort of fellow: his view of the world has been shaped by the parsonage and as such he is basically quite unsophisticated. His father's narrow morality has remained with him. Stated simply, it is to "resolve fixedly never, through any possible motives, to do anything which you believe to be wrong" (251). However, these ethical concepts are not the essential part of his vision; they are the ready made

materials by which he can construct an ideal self. In Jim's case, the ideal self is evolved through society's ideals, but the essence of this vision is not basically ethical. Jim qualifies as a romantic hero because he belongs to the band of men who strive for impossible ends, to give a gleam and a glow to the mire of existence. But Jim's vision, stripped of its heroic trappings, places supreme reliance on self as reality. One is accountable to oneself, one needs to be true to oneself and that is existence. In the novel, we see the break-down of the external world for an individual, who finally finds himself far from his community and all that he has known. He is literally uprooted from his civilization, an alien in quest for the self. This is the drama of Jim who never really obtains self-knowledge but instead lives true to a glorified version of the self. It is his salvation, his way of extricating himself from the dilemma of existence.

The vision of severed existence is not new or unique with Conrad. Many other people share in this alienated vision, and it is perhaps useful to look at their expression of it. The sense of frustration with the universe is felt by Camus, for example, because of man's basic inability to comprehend the world. It is a subjective matter, a kind of feeling perhaps that senses the alienation but is real because of the incapacity to assimilate the external world, to relate it to himself: ". . . it is an insistence upon familiarity, an appetite for clarity. Understanding the world for a man is reducing it to the human, stamping it with his seal."² Camus' conclusion then that existence is absurd and meaningless and that men are humiliated can lead to a state of despair, the result "of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world."³

This sense of alienation is also allied to a disbelief in God. Sartre perhaps states the basics of inner subjective reality when he says in his essay "Existentialism" that existence precedes essence: "Not only is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is also only what he wills himself to be after his thrust toward existence."⁴ Man constantly becomes, he is what he makes of himself, and he is fully responsible for what he is, and because God does not exist for him, he has no way of escaping full responsibility for his actions, as "there is no determinism, man is free, man is freedom."⁵ His reality is subjective and yet, says Sartre, there is an universality in his acts, for, "in making his choice [of action] he also chooses for all men. In fact, in creating the man^{that} we want to be, there is not a single one of our acts which does not at the same time create an image of a man as we think he ought to be."⁶ This side-track into Camus and Sartre is to elucidate the vision of Jim and Kurtz, a vision where determinism is discarded, alienation from the moral universe (represented by society) is expressed, and the reality of the individual's world is shown to have great intensity and drama. Conrad is fascinated by this vision, the divorce of man from his world, and he takes us one step further in Heart of Darkness where the individual is made to confront the world he has created.

The dramatization of Kurtz brings Jim's vision to a logical extremity. Kurtz is a perverted version of Jim but both are ruled by the reality of the self, except that Kurtz's glorified version of himself disintegrates after a while and then he exists in complete license. This drama is played in a situation almost parallel to Jim's: Kurtz goes to a remote part of the earth, to the very heart of a

strange continent, there to bring his power and strength to the native people. He gathers to himself a faithful following over whom he rules like a god, and like Jim, he has a strong sense of ownership, "'My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my -- ' everything belonged to him.'" ⁷ He is terribly isolated from the outer world, like Jim in Patusan in his physical and moral isolation. Initially as an emissary of light, a representative of the "International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs," he is different from the other European employees of the ivory company, the manager, his spy and the horde of ivory-hungry "pilgrims" who do not care even for the veneer of civilization in their ravages of the land. Thus, because of his "culture," his sophistication and perhaps his eloquence, he is morally isolated, because Europe is not there to prop him up in the great indifferent jungle. Marlow identifies with both Jim and Kurtz, perhaps much more with Kurtz, because he can patronize Jim, whose vision of innocence he cannot share, but Kurtz brings him closer to a realization, the horror of existence centred on the self. For unlike Jim, Kurtz comes closer to self-knowledge finally, because he too follows his dream, except that half-way through the game, he forgets to pretend that he is pursuing high cultural ideals. He too has his illusion of reality, his egoism before and after Africa is pronounced: "'You show them you have in you something that is really profitable, and then there will be no limits to the recognition of your ability,' he would say. 'Of course you must take care of the motives -- right motives -- always'" (101). The irony is that he forgets about the "right motives" but not the unlimited ability. The inner station and vicinity give him room for expression, and he was therefore loathe to leave; his

fascination was with the world he has created for himself, his tribe of natives, and the revelry at these "midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites, which -- . . . were offered up to him - - . . ."

(73). The fascination with the darkness and the mystery of the jungle corresponds with his fascination for the bizarre, the Dionysian in himself. Hence, his plunder of native villages for ivory, his immorality, his lusts. From a moral point of view, he is entirely degraded and disintegrated, as his conduct is so divergent from his reputation, his talents and his professed aims.

Naturally, however, Kurtz cannot be judged with conventional morality, and one can seriously question Marlow's moral attitude, his talk about your "own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness" (72). One wonders where this "true stuff," this "inborn strength," is to come from. Marlow's own careful attitude is reflected in his fear to wholly commit himself, to try to preserve his sanity somehow in this world turned inside out, because the whole journey of darkness takes him to the innermost self. The novella realistically externalizes the inner drama, for the whole journey to the heart of darkness is both real and symbolic. The journey is clearly a journey of the soul. What is tangible and what is intangible are deliberately fused, giving the whole journey a night-marish quality. Marlow feels it:

. . . the general sense of vague and oppressive wonder grew upon me. It was like a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares (19)

It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream -- making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams . . . (38)

Living is equated with dreaming as in Lord Jim, for the way of "how to be" is "to follow the dream." How does one distinguish between existence and illusion, or is there any difference? The deliberate blurring of the distinction is apparent. Marlow, one can say, is a little thrown off even at the start of the experience; the real thing is the jungle, its power, its magic and the unreal, the commonplace, the accountant in his starched clothes. He is "a vision" (24) because he is so out of place. What the people do, the plotting and the scheming seem unreal too, "unreal as everything else -- as their philanthropic pretense of the whole concern" (34). People "glided past like phantoms" (52) and it seems that the mystery of the forest is more poignant and therefore more real compared to the petty ambitions of people. There seems to be an inversion here, but this is not so when we see that the inner drama is externalized so that what is closer to inner reality (for example, jungle as symbol) is presented with greater poignancy + though not with greater clarity. Heart of Darkness therefore makes a more forceful and direct impact on the reader in that the imagery and symbols are so effectively used that they are accepted on both the literal and imaginative levels in the world turned upside down and inside out.

In this altercation between reality and non-reality, Marlow is brought to the heart of self-knowledge, almost, and on this journey, the inner reality takes precedence over external reality -- the imposed order--and indeed the world of order has to be deliberately willed into being. Marlow tries very hard not to lose himself into himself by attending to external things, by demanding rivets, a sure thing to hold the ship together and something to hold him together too. He

employs subterfuges to keep a hold on himself. "When we have to attend to things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality -- the reality, I tell you -- fades. The inner truth is hidden, luckily, luckily" (49). Marlow is brought just to the edge of the precipice, but he has a glimpse of the horror. This takes Lord Jim one step farther, for we see the human soul in total isolation, obsessed with itself, confronted with itself, in honesty, with no glamour, no "moral restraint". Nothing can touch it -- it lives in supreme self-realization -- surely the ultimate dream of the ego. The fate of Kurtz is this, that this supreme self-knowledge is also a terrible negation of the self, because it is but a "hollow sham", a disembodied "voice". There is no substance at all to it, and thus, the horror. The tragedy is the discovery that there is no "true stuff" at all. We have the feeling that if Marlow goes as far as Kurtz did, there would be no talk of "innate strength" either. Heart of Darkness thus seen in conjunction with Lord Jim throws a sombre light on the romantic vision. Jim's refusal to see the darkness is his saving grace in one way but who knows what might happen to his exalted existence if his egoism started to play havoc? Marlow goes through the darkness and gives an even more hopeless aspect to the dilemma of existence -- for this is the bottomless pit -- the everlasting deep hole indeed.

CHAPTER II

THE SKEPTIC

Conrad's vision encompasses more than one dimension of the unaccommodated man. Lord Jim, for all its moral ambiguity, is based on the concept of existence as illusion or dream, for from first to last, Jim puts his faith in his illusion, though from Marlow's viewpoint, this is almost like self-deception. The distinction between the conscious man and the unconscious man is already being made; ultimately, the reader realises that Marlow and not Jim is the protagonist of the novel, for his perceptiveness is an essential quality of the conscious man, except that in Lord Jim, the ethical Marlow still does not relinquish his hold on traditional values. In Heart of Darkness the characterization of Marlow as the conscious man reaches an unprecedented intensity, and for the first time, he faces the heart of the matter, no longer from a moral and esthetic distance. All his assumptions are brought into question in the experience of Kurtz, who can be regarded as Marlow's double because of Marlow's immediate and intimate identification with him, and Marlow emerges from the nightmare bereft of his illusion, his belief in the tenacity and strength of the innate self, the being which is the store of all moral fibre. This is the horror indeed, the dead end, for without the illusion of a moral or romantic self, existence is grim, as hollow men in an indifferent universe. The plight of the unaccommodated man, the man uprooted, divorced from his

environment is again the theme in Victory and Nostromo where the position of the conscious man, the man who is intellectually convinced of the meaninglessness of existence, is dramatised. The stance taken by these two characters, Decoud and Heyst, is nihilistic, and Conrad's skepticism likewise is given the most direct expression through these two characters.

Conrad's almost compulsive interest in the alienated man has already been noted, and his vision of the plight of man is almost existential, but while it is possible to see existential qualities in Conrad, it is not necessary to classify him, for existentialism is after all "a kind of poetry of the philosophical imagination, defying rational systematization."¹ Incapability to comprehend the universe is the basic agony of many Conradian characters, paralleling the existential view that if there is order and meaning in the universe, it is not within man's ken. The existentialist further posits there is no god in such a universe and man has no function to fulfil. Therefore, man is an anomaly, and if he is the conscious man, he sees himself as an anomaly, and the absurdity of his position is presented through his clarity of vision so that he must ponder on the question of suicide. Though the existentialist presumably affirms life in spite of the absurdity of it, the agony is in the living, for he is left alone to face the great puzzle, and he tries not to succumb to it. All this should have a familiar ring as far as Conrad is concerned, for his obsession is with the opposition of man and the universe, the victimization of man by exterior forces, the alienation of man from his environment and the spiritual and moral dilemma of the isolated man. Conrad himself in his letters to Cunninghame Graham had

explicitly stated a very skeptical attitude to life. The tragedy is intensified by consciousness, because it is a helpless kind of comprehension:

Of course reason is hateful, -- but why? Because it demonstrates (to those who have the courage) that we, living, are out of life, -- utterly out of it. The mysteries of a universe made of drops of fire and clods of mud do not concern us in the least. The fate of a humanity condemned ultimately to perish from cold is not worth troubling about. If you take it to heart it becomes an unendurable tragedy. . . . Life knows us not and we do not know life, -- we don't know even our own thoughts. Half the words we use have no meaning whatever and the other half each man understands each word after the fashion of his own folly and conceit. Faith is a myth and beliefs shift like mists on the shore: thoughts vanish: words, once pronounced, die: and the₂ memory of yesterday is as shadowy as the hope of to-morrow, . . .

Conrad sees consciousness as essential to tragedy:

What makes mankind tragic is not that they are the victims of nature, it is that they are conscious of it. To be part of the animal kingdom under the conditions of this earth is very well, -- but as soon as you know of your slavery, the pain, the anger, the strife, -- the tragedy begins. We can't return to nature, since we can't change our place in it. . . . There is no morality, no knowledge and no hope: there is only the consciousness of ourselves which drives us about a world that, whether seen in a convex or a concave mirror, is always but a vain and floating appearance.³

While it is not necessary to deduce from the evidence that Conrad had a systematic philosophy of life, it is clear that he did have his skeptical moments, and his skepticism should be placed within a nineteenth-century framework for the purpose of illumination. The view of the godless and thus absurd universe is by no means a nineteenth-century invention, but it began its popular resurgence then chiefly as a reaction against the complacency of the scientific rationalists and utilitarian philosophers who popularized the concept of an orderly scheme of things in which man too becomes a measurable object. Man, in this concept, is improvable, just as other products are made better in

the march of civilization. The skeptic here encounters a world where the twin gods of progress and technology are worshipped and where material utopianism reduces man to a malleable but de-humanized being. The skeptic knows that the positivist is under a vast illusion; he is the conscious man who says like Conrad that

If you believe in improvement you must weep, for the attained perfection must end in cold, darkness and silence. In a dispassionate view the ardour for reform, improvement, for virtue, for knowledge and even for beauty is only a vain sticking up for appearances, as though one were anxious about the cut of one's clothes in a community of blind men.⁴

To put one's faith in human reason is therefore the greatest folly, as David Hume had shown systematically a century before Conrad. What he does in An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding is to put our assumptions of the operation of human reason under scrutiny, and the conclusions he reaches are a little disconcerting to the self-satisfied rationalist. He distinguishes between two areas of knowledge; mathematical knowledge, in which relations of ideas are "discoverable by the mere operation of thought, without dependence on what is anywhere existent in the universe,"⁵ and matters of fact whose real existence is by no means assured, as all reasonings concerning matter of fact seem to be founded on the relation of Cause and Effect.⁶ Although it is a human trait to make a connection between present fact and what can be inferred from it, thus assuming that the particular cause produces a certain effect, Hume says that the assumption is derived from experience and not from reason, and that cause and effect have no necessary connection and are really different entities. It is through observation and experience alone that we can infer cause and effect, and our conclusions from that experience are not founded on reasoning or any

process of the understanding. Such being the case, it is fruitless to try to determine "ultimate springs and principles"⁷ for they are totally shut off from human curiosity and understanding since we are not capable of understanding matters of fact except through custom and habit. Likewise, the theory of a supreme Deity is beyond man because it involves experience remote from us, and moreover, "We are ignorant, it is true, of the manner in which bodies operate on each other: Their force or energy is entirely incomprehensible: But are we not equally ignorant of the manner of force by which a mind, even the supreme mind, operates either on itself or on body?"⁸ What Hume is saying in effect points to the limitation of reason, for just as mathematical knowledge is self-contained, in that complex and complicated reasonings can take place within the system without having objective concomitants, likewise connections can be made in our minds in the various functions of everyday existence through habit alone.

Hume's enquiry has two very important implications: first that man's reason is limited, and second, that the world has no meaning that can be apprehended by reason so that man has no proper role to speak of with any logical certainty. The atmosphere which is created by this kind of thinking is a clue to understanding Conrad's portrayal of the skeptics Decoud and Heyst. The skeptic becomes intellectually aware of the incomprehensibility of existence, because it is through his reason that he sees the limitation of reason in constructing a logical system out of the world. He thus consciously and intellectually repudiates the world as meaningless because he is incapable of fitting it into a logical construct. In Victory and Nostromo Conrad presents two conscious skeptics in Heyst and Decoud

who have nihilistic attitudes, and both are detached from the main currents of human activity. Decoud, by Father Corbelan's analysis, is "Neither the son of his own country nor of any other," "the victim of this faithless age,"⁹ while Heyst has the intention "to drift altogether and literally, body and soul, like a detached leaf drifting in the wind-currents under the immovable trees of a forest glade; to drift without ever catching on to anything."¹⁰ Both are conscious skeptics in that their skepticism is an intellectual conviction. In fact, in Heyst's case, it is the result of intellectual conditioning, for his skeptical father had early given him "a special insight into its mastery of despair."¹¹ As for Decoud, he "had recognized no other virtue than intelligence, and had erected passions into duties."¹² Their concept of the world and of human action is highly cynical, and if they had their way, they would be utterly out of it all. Decoud and Heyst philosophically scorn action, but they are both drawn into the ring in spite of themselves. Decoud attributes this to his passion for Antonio, but the levity of his attitude in the creation of the Sulaco republic is worse than non-action, revealing his ultimate contempt for activity. As for Heyst, his aversion to involvement is a manifestation of his scorn; ". . . all action is bound to be harmful. It is devilish. That is why this world is evil upon the whole" (54). He is the bemused spectator on the fringe of existence, who refuses to be corrupted by making for himself human ties. Unfortunately, both were unable to remain "pure" as Conrad structurally and contextually exposes ^{the} dilemma of the skeptic.

Heyst's drama can be seen as the altercation between negation and affirmation of life, and the reader tries to get the gist of the

novel through a structural analysis of it. Taken on one level, Victory traces the process of negation to a re-affirmation of life, a process of non-involvement to involvement. Within the structure, there is a series of complexes which must be taken into account in order to enhance appreciation of the whole pattern which emerges through the interweaving. There are at least two attitudes at work in the novel: first, the skeptical view presented by Heyst, an independent dramatic sensibility, and second, the ethical view presented by the author through the structure and texture of the novel, which forces the reader to see Heyst from a moral standpoint.

The position of the skeptic is more than amply drawn in the novel. Heyst, at first glance, seems to possess the intellectual and moral opinions of the skeptic. His life motto is "Look on -- make no sound" (175), as he is more of a spectator than a participant. In fact his withdrawal is based on the inability to understand the workings of the universe, and he believes that if anything, man is more prone to evil than good. Man is an anomaly: "Man on this earth is an unforeseen accident which does not stand close investigation" (196). The world of appearances is capable of much evil as "this earth must be the appointed hatching planet of calumny enough to furnish the whole universe" (215). Though Heyst seems to give the impression that he exists on the periphery of society because he could not be part of the evil world, the moral stance is necessarily a facade. Having no understanding of evil, he cannot possibly have any conception of morality. His mumblings about evil action serve therefore to disguise his amoral position, for he has withdrawn from life without properly understanding why. The direct cause of his action lies with his dominating,

iconoclastic father, that "destroyer of systems, of hopes, of beliefs" (175). He got hold of Heyst at that "plastic and impressionable age" (91), and asserted such an influence on him that it continued even after his father's death. Thus, at an early age, he had cultivated a profound mistrust of life, and had viewed life "outside the flattering optical delusion of everlasting hope, of conventional self-deceptions, of an ever expected happiness" (82). Significantly, he has not made any deliberate decisions himself, as his skepticism is inherited. The traumatic experience of his father's death serves to further alienate him from an unbiased perception of life. It meant a continued withdrawal into complete isolationism: "The dead man had kept him on the bank by his side. And now Heyst felt acutely that he was alone on the bank of the stream. In his pride he determined not to enter it" (175-6). The point is that he has become a skeptic through admiration for his father, and his skepticism is at best a learned thing, not warranted by his own experience. It is possible thus to view Heyst as an irresponsible person who has ~~slide~~ into a skeptical view of life without putting it to ^{the} _λ test. Pathetic irony is evident when Conrad says that the only reality, "something having an absolute existence" (176) for Heyst, was some furniture left by his father. Until he met Lena, his experience of life was minimal and the girl awoke in him real sensations; her glance of recognition "was real, the most real impression of his detached existence" (93).

It is fair to conclude from the evidence that Heyst is not a lucid skeptic, for his skepticism is almost a stance of convenience suited to his temperament which easily became habitual. There is a quality of artificiality of deception in his whole position, for he

has deluded himself into believing himself a skeptic, and thus detachment, a state of negation, is the ideal climate for his existence, and this basic dishonesty enables him to remain unsoiled, but not entirely. The involvement with Lena and Morrison demonstrates dramatically how untenable and how vulnerable Heyst's stance is as he is almost utterly defenceless against human emotion. It is commendable that Heyst shows a sense of human kinship on both these occasions, but his involvement also shows that his aloofness, his elaborate politeness is but a facade, and his negation is not an assertion in that he is carrying out particular convictions, but a withdrawal. It is therefore not without significance that the Morrison affair should be tainted with such a scandalous and ugly hue; this partly proves Heyst's point that action is evil, and that the world is a hatching place for calumny. There are more subtle undertones: the world attributes Morrison's death to him, and Schomberg's story is the very perversion of truth, but significantly, Heyst also feels guilty about it, and not without good cause, for, as friend and intimate, he misleads Morrison into assuming that he is capable of friendship while he himself is intellectually convinced he is not, thus betraying Morrison and also himself. In this light, Heyst is a highly irresponsible person, and his guilt about Morrison should be double-fold because he has deceived himself into unintentionally deceiving Morrison.

What then is more appropriate than the tension filled drama of Heyst's discovery of the world's opinion of the Heyst-Morrison venture? It hurts him, of course, to hear of the scandal, but his explosion indicates that the story has struck close to home. The whole scene is very tense: the girl feels nervous and unstable because he

is spouting his philosophy of non-involvement, lamenting that he had "in a moment of inadvertence, created for myself a tie. . . . But is that friendship? I am not sure what it was. I only know that he who forms a tie is lost. The germ of corruption has entered into 'his soul' (199-200). He is not conscious that Lena's case is a duplication of Morrison's, and his attitude of near-regret is to create uneasiness in her. The guilt he feels in connection with Morrison's death is carried over to his relationship with Lena, as he is still dominated by his father's voice issuing from the grave, warning him that "Of the strategems of life the most cruel is the consolation of love -- and the most subtle, too" (219). Pulled too in another direction, he has to cope with "the original Adam in[him]" (173). For the first time he is reacting and in a sensual way. He is now capable of revulsion and attraction: "In his soul and in his body he experienced a nervous reaction from tenderness. All at once, without transition, he detested her. But only for a moment" (215). He even reacts to the Morrison scandal with a physical sensation, the desire to spit (218). Though Lena is to open up new experiences for him which will undermine his skepticism, he delays the confrontation with himself, being still detached from the world and subject to the delusion that he is free from responsibility. He thinks they are immune from intrusion on the island ("there are no voices here to remind us"), that he can forget his betrayal of Morrison, and that he can keep Lena and yet remain unscathed.

The ambivalence of his attitude explains why his relationship with Lena is ultimately unsatisfactory. With his scant experience of reality (the reality of things, people, emotions), Heyst has difficulty grasping the reality of the girl; she is "so vague, so elusive

and illusory" (222) when out of sight. He has to be near her to sense her reality; his weakness is due to his inexperience, for the only reality he has known lies in the self-sufficient world of intellectual speculation. In fact, he tends to think of Lena, to regard her, as "a script in an unknown language" (222). Lena intuits that this is truly the case; she appeals to him to think of her, for her existence depends on it, "I can only be what you think I am" (187). The girl senses his lack of intuitive understanding when she says, ". . . it seems to me that you can never love me for myself, only for myself, as people do love each other when it is to be for ever" (221/317). She senses but does not fully understand this emotional impasse, and her solution is to render the supreme sacrifice: ". . . all her energy was concentrated on the struggle that she wanted to take upon herself, in a great exaltation of love and self-sacrifice" (317). She blames herself for the imperfection in their relationship, unable and unwilling to see that the fault lies with Heyst. She feels inferior, as if "her passion were of a hopelessly lower quality, unable to appease some exalted and delicate desire of his superior soul" (330).

Heyst's entire moral position is put to a test in the confrontation with the "evil trio." Conrad has been accused of playing the trio up unnecessarily, and for over-dramatising his villains. It is true that the three characters, "plain" Mr. Jones, Martin Ricardo and Pedro are perhaps over characterized as "spectre, cat and ape" (128) so that they appear more symbolic than real. We underestimate Conrad if we think that the villains are put there to create mere sensationalism; the essential evil they embody, "evil intelligence, instinctive savagery" (329) is extremely relevant in highlighting Heyst's own

moral position. Heyst lives in an amoral world, and he does not know what evil is, because that cannot exist in his scheme of things, in which there is no plan, no logicality, but is a "Great Joke" (198) altogether. Although he speaks of action as evil and is aware that truth can be perverted and is, (for truth to the world is appearance and appearances can be misconstrued, deliberately or otherwise), evil, as an absolute force, is meaningless to Heyst just as good as a positive energy is alien to him. The world is insubstantial to him, a patch of grey: "It seemed as if in his conception of a world not worth touching, and perhaps not substantial enough to grasp, these familiar objects [pieces of furniture] . . . were the only realities, . . ." (176). The intrusion of the trio into his seclusion, his very own paradise, is highly significant. The timing is made ironical, for just as Heyst is assuring himself and Lena that they are safe on the island in their isolation from the inimical world (" . . . there are no voices here to remind us" and "Nothing can break in on us here" (223) by which words Heyst thinks he can live in the world and be outside it), Wang arrives to report the sighting of the craft carrying the trio. It is quite obvious that the presence of the trio, or evil incarnate, in a sense externalizes the inner drama of Heyst, in the confrontation of his amoral world and the concrete force of evil. The symbolic function is made evident; Jones is more than once called a spectre, "His voice somehow matched his sunken eyes. It was hollow without being in the least mournful; it sounded distant, uninterested, as though he were speaking from the bottom of a well" (110). When in Samburan, he simulates a sick man, but the stench of death around him is felt, and his sick-bed has the suggestion of a grave. The energy presented by

the three men (brute force, savagery, evil intelligence) is something entirely foreign to Heyst, who would not believe in its reality. He sees them as "fantasms from the sea -- apparitions! chimeras! And they persist" (329). He would expel them from his world if he could do it, but they remain and he is rendered helpless.

The characters Jones, Ricardo and Pedro are used in the novel as artistic tools to reveal the complexities and perhaps the weaknesses of the skeptical vision. Heyst's negation of life is very much a withdrawal and denial; his spiritual and moral world is ^a vacuum, and up to the advent of the trio, he is hesitant of total involvement; even Lena cannot involve him entirely, partly because he is crippled for life through habit. The theme of retribution in the novel is intriguing, suggesting that the skeptical vision is untenable and that the ethical view must reassert itself. Seen in symbolic terms, Jones and Company lift the drama to an universal scale, for they plague the erring party like vengeful furies, and Heyst calls them "envoys of the outer world" (329), while Jones, lying on his bed, says with his death-like voice, "I am he who is" (317), which is highly enigmatical and suggestive. Lena is intuitively aware of some wrong, some crime; "She wanted to know whether this trouble, this danger, this evil, whatever it was, finding them out in their retreat, was not a sort of punishment" (353-4). Jones too articulates this view of his mission: " . . . I am the world itself, come to pay you a visit. . . . I am a sort of fate -- the retribution that waits its time" (379). He is certainly spectral and uncanny enough to make him credible as an agent of fate, but he is "the world itself," the thing that Heyst would have nothing to do with. The theme of sin and retribution is brought in mainly to enact the

confrontation of evil and nothingness. Heyst's concept of the world as nothingness is put to a challenge, and shown to be inadequate, as it has no energy. The withdrawal from society is therefore seen as a transgression, and detachment a betrayal of the human community, and Heyst is guilty of both. The amoral position is shown to be inadequate, and the authorial view suggests that he is not competent as a human being, and that negation is not the solution. A moral position should be developed, if only in self-defence. Heyst realizes his inadequacy, for he has no heaven to appeal to: "He considered himself a dead man already, . . . He regretted that he had no Heaven to which he could recommend this fair, palpitating handful of ashes and dust -- warm, living, sentient, his own -- and exposed helplessly to insult, outrage, degradation, and infinite misery of the body" (354-5).

The oblique identification of Heyst with Jones suggested by the authorial view brings out the moral issue in perspective. Both are gentlemen by birth and courteous by education; Heyst's politeness is his facade and Jones values "good form." Both exist in the periphery of society, drifting along without destination; Jones himself says he is "an outcast, almost an outlaw" (379) and he claims his right to be on the island, "his presence here was no more morally reprehensible than [Heyst's]" (320). He, of course, projects himself when he thinks that Heyst is like him, motivated by the same things, imbued with subtle and evil intelligence. The similarities are far-fetched on the surface, but Jones indeed can be identified with Heyst inasmuch as he is a perversion as well as an extension of the latter. The moral irresponsibility of both is apparent, for they exist outside the law, outside society, with the difference that one is neutral, and the other

poses constant threats to society. Likewise, both misuse intelligence either to arrive at indifference or rebellion directed against society. Heyst's inability to love parallels Jones' misogyny, the psychological state which reflects a moral incompleteness.

Thus, the novel can be perceived on two levels: the more universal application is the most apparent and is intimated through symbolism and a semi-allegorical approach which make the personalities and the conflict seem larger than life. This is indeed appropriate, for Conrad is dealing here with a whole vision of life, necessitating conception on a grandiose scale. However, the drama on the psychological level is also convincing as can be seen in the close identification of Heyst and Jones. In this psychological sub-stratum, Jones and Heyst are offsprings of the same parent, revealing different aspects of the same substance. Conrad is essentially saying that the moral position of both is the same, that inherent in Heyst's amoral attitude is an immoral one which Jones brings to the surface. The retribution theme, seen in this light, is illuminating, as Heyst's attitude is intrinsically reprehensible. The irresponsibility of Heyst is ultimately evil as it is fused with Jones'. On the cosmic scale, retribution is brought about through the agent of evil, a concrete force in the world of nothingness. The extent of this evil as an absolute force is difficult to determine, but the universal level, seen as an extension and expansion of the individual stance, expresses necessarily the same prevailing idea, not of evil as an absolute force but as an implicit force in the nihilistic attitude. The denouement of Victory carries this double-faceted tragedy through. Ostensibly, Heyst achieves victory in finally rejecting his skeptical attitude, lamenting over

his misdirected life: "'Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love -- and to put its trust in life!'" (410) He is thus converted to an ethical view, renouncing his former stance. However, there is enough ambiguity in the final pages to suggest that the renunciation is not so clear-cut, that Heyst remains true to character to the end, that, in fact, redemption is meaningless to him. This undercurrent is, I think, a reflection of the author's own ambiguity. The retribution theme brings in an ethical view which is really the only workable view in application to human existence, for Conrad sees that withdrawal is not the solution. However, underlying this ethical view which seems to resolve everything is the pessimistic strain that initially inclines Heyst to skepticism, the suggestion that all is fruitless, anyhow, as all ends in "nothing." The unsatisfactory relationship between Heyst and Lena remains so to the end, for even at the last, his soul is fastidious: "Heyst bent low over her, cursing his fastidious soul, which even at that moment kept the true cry of love from his lips in its infernal mistrust of all life" (406). The barrier still persists, and Heyst, in spite of his tenderness, is far from her, and the victory she thinks she has achieved is highly ironical, for there is none. She is elated in that she has accomplished this supreme sacrifice, but Heyst remains the same, finally as uncaring as ever as he stumbles out of his skeptical stance; his one last positive act, suicide, is again characteristic withdrawal, for he willingly faces convenient annihilation rather than deal with the aftermath of the mess. He slides into it as he slides into everything else, into the action that takes the least effort.

The pathetic paralysis of mind and body experienced by Heyst

is not as evident in Martin Decoud of Nostromo, whose consciousness of his cynicism far exceeds Heyst's in that while the baron takes his role in dead earnest, the dilettante is capable of being cynical about his own skepticism. With Decoud, the skepticism is almost, one suspects, a style, a habit deliberately adopted and cultivated to impress both himself and the world, because by mocking the world, he can sustain "his affection of amused superiority."¹³ The narrator gives us a clue to his character: "He had pushed the habit of universal raillery to a point where it blinded him to the genuine impulses of his own nature" (153). His habit, however, once assumed, cannot be cast off, and thus, in the eyes of himself and the reader, he is the skeptic, the one who views action, especially political action as futile, and though drawn into it indeed to become the master brain of a new republic, he is sufficiently skeptical to be cynical of the whole thing. The ardour and fervour that he gives to be partisan of political intrigues, which he says, is like "ploughing the sea" (187), he attributes to the "supreme illusion of a lover." As a lover, he is capable of emotions: "[Antonia] was facing him now in the deep recess of the window, very close and motionless. Her lips moved rapidly. Decoud, leaning his back against the wall, listened with crossed arms and lowered eyelids. He drank the tones of her even voice, and watched the agitated life of her throat, as if waves of emotions had run from her heart to pass out into the air in her reasonable words" (183). His love for Antonio, the first woman to break his equanimity, is the ground for his involvement in politics, significantly, a very ephemeral kind of activity, "these deadly futilities in pronunciamientos and reforms" (183), but he believes he is true to himself as "the man with no faith in anything

except the truth of his own sensations" (229). His fascination with Antonia is the most concrete and real thing in his life, a force which made Decoud earnest, or as his sister sees it, "She had never seen Martin take so much trouble about anything in his whole life" (154). The truth of his feelings for Antonio is the truth of his own sensations, thus explaining the paradoxical situation of the skeptic in love. He is skeptical and cynical enough to see through human actions, and as the skeptic, he is antithetical to the romantic such as Charles Gould: "I cannot endow my personal desires with a shining robe of silk and jewels. Life is not for me a moral romance derived from the tradition of a pretty fairy tale" (218). As he himself sees it, he does not need to sustain himself with an illusion as Gould does, who destroys his married life in the process, as he thinks he is above all illusions.

Armed with his lucid skepticism, Decoud provides an almost authorial view of the characters and actions portrayed in the novel, though it is undeniable that the author does treat him ironically, calling him the "exotic dandy of the Parisian boulevard" (229), "the dilettante in life" (200), the "idle cumberer" (157). Nonetheless, he is also the sensibility through which the author reflects his own. Idealism, or existence founded on a supreme illusion, corrupts both Charles Gould and in a different way, Morygham. Gould, by Decoud's analysis, is a sentimentalist, defined as a person "who attached a strangely idealistic meaning to concrete facts" (219), and an idealist, or "simply that he cannot act or exist without idealizing every simple feeling, desire, or achievement. He could not believe his own motives if he did not make them first a part of some fairy tale" (215). Gould's idealism is destructive as Mrs. Gould is aware, for it has riven their

relationship irreparably:

The fate of the San Tomé mine was lying heavy upon her heart. It was a long time now since she had begun to fear it. It had been an idea. She had watched it with misgivings turning into a fetish, and now the fetish had grown into a monstrous and crushing weight. It was as if the inspiration of their early years had left her heart to turn into a wall of silver bricks, erected by the silent work of evil spirits, between her and her husband. (221-222)

Monygham appropriately, is maimed in body and soul, for his idealism having failed him once, he proceeds to deliberately degrade himself in his own eyes. Even Nostromo comes to the realization that it is insufficient to feed on the illusion of self-glory, as all his arduous feats of courage and rewards in power are futile, transitory, with no assurance of permanence. Idealism or illusion either corrupts or is corruptible in a land where the only permanent matter is the incorruptible metal, the silver which, however, corrupts men. Within the context of the flux of history (Mitchell's "historical events") and the susceptibilities of the human mind and soul, Decoud withholds from falling prey to a sustaining illusion, until the author shows that intelligence alone does not suffice to cope with existence.

Decoud's night-journey into the Placid Gulf, culminating in self-abnegation on the Great Isabel, could be seen as Conrad's repudiation of the skeptical stance. Faced with the universe of "incomprehensible images" (498) he is aware of "a misdirected life given up to impulses" (498). The journey to the confrontation with the immense indifference of things is seen by Claire Rosenfield as a night journey, where the boundary between the real voyage and the interior journey of the psyche is blurred.¹⁴ In the Placid Gulf neither Decoud's intellect nor Nostromo's keen sense of judgement is of any use: "Decoud was

affected by the novelty of his position. Intellectually self-confident, he suffered from being deprived of the only weapon he could use with effect. No intelligence could penetrate the darkness of the Placid Gulf" (275). His whole life is undermined by the darkness, and "All his active sensations and feelings from as far back as he could remember seemed to him the maddest of dreams" (267). The state resembles death:

He didn't even know at times whether he were asleep or awake. Like a man lost in slumber, he heard nothing, he saw nothing. Even his hand held before his face did not exist for his eyes. The change from the agitation, the passions, and the dangers, from the sights and sounds of the shore, was so complete that it would have resembled death had it not for the survival of his thoughts. In this foretaste of eternal peace they floated vivid and light, like unearthly clear dreams of earthly things that may haunt the souls freed by death from the misty atmosphere of regrets and hopes. (262)

The transition to a confrontation with the innermost self is thus made, for previous to that Decoud is only familiar with the facade of skepticism; his cynicism, directed as much to himself as to others, is a pose he almost enjoys. The test on the Great Isabel is one of utter solitude, as he now has "to grapple with himself single-handed" (497). "Solitude from mere outward condition of existence becomes very swiftly a state of soul in which the affection of irony and skepticism have no place. It takes possession of the mind, and drives forth the thought into the exile of utter unbelief" (497). The author diagnoses Decoud's case: "The brilliant Costaguanaro of the boulevards had died from solitude and want of faith in himself and others" (496). The lack of faith is Decoud's undoing for he has nothing to hold on to, no illusion, no faith, and the universe becomes "a succession of incomprehensible images" (498); his solitude "appeared like

a great void, and the silence of the gulf like a tense, thin cord to which he hung suspended by both hands, without fear, without surprise, without any sort of emotion whatever" (498). Even the scornful Antonio is nothing but an "allegorical statue" in this case. The frivolity of skepticism dissipates when there is nothing to be skeptical about, and Decoud has no sustaining alternatives. In examining Decoud's tragedy, the authorial voice has this to say: "In our activity alone do we find the sustaining illusion of an independent existence as against the whole scheme of things of which we form a helpless part" (497).

The description and analysis of Decoud's suicide illuminate the tragedy of skepticism and solitude. The author's attitude to Decoud is largely sympathetic, though also ironical, for Decoud's consciousness, is to some extent, the author's. The fact is that the lucid skeptic is incapable of remedying the immense indifference of things and may indeed become a victim of it. Decoud reaches this state of utter despair because he has lost the illusion of skepticism, or as Robert Penn Warren puts it, "Skepticism, the attitude of intelligence that would be self-sufficient, cannot survive, ironically enough, except by the presence of illusion."¹⁵ The two novels Nostromo and Victory show Conrad understanding the skeptical attitude, but he reaches the conclusion that utter skepticism is too much akin to nihilism, an unfruitful kind of negation of life. He further shows the similarity of skepticism to other attitudes, based on illusion, be it idealism or romanticism, for it too is often a pose, a facade which will lead us to a solitude which we can neither comprehend nor endure.

CHAPTER III

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ISOLATO

In the position of the skeptics and those who compulsively detach themselves from other men and from society as a whole is implied the fragmentation of the self which is a perennial theme in Conrad. A fully integrated self fulfills the basic function of adjusting to society while a fragmented personality has the tendency to withdraw into itself. The division of the self into distinguishable and semi-independent components manifests a psychic malady, the dissonance in a harmonious entity. The afflicted individual is thrown into conflict, for he is pulled by opposing tendencies and desires, all emanating from himself. He is at a loss to reconcile these and is thus thrown into a state of immobilization and paralysis. C.G. Jung, who has done much to emphasize the importance of psychic health, shows that much of the conscious mind is governed by the unconscious psyche, and the two function together, hopefully, in harmony. Repression of psychic activity by the conscious, rational mind is naturally injurious and will invite repercussions of one kind or another. Jung's division of the personality into "persona" and "shadow" perhaps clarifies the situation. He calls the public face of the person the "mask" or "persona" which is worn to befit the role played in society. It is our compromise with society, our way to relate to it.¹ The "shadow", on the other hand, is to be found in the personal unconscious, and is inferior to the conscious self, because "it is all those uncivilized

desires and emotions that are incompatible with social standards and our ideal personality, all that we are ashamed of, all that we do not want to know about ourselves."² The epithet "inferior" attached to the shadow is largely moralistic of course, portraying the attitude of society toward the non-conformist and illicit behaviour of the shadow. The tension within the individual between the conscious, rational force and unconscious, non-rational being results in alienating the person from himself, thus making him feel estranged, divided and even doubled. It is by no means easy to determine the exact nature of psychic life which is "always below the horizon of consciousness" and "barely visible."³ However, sense, experience and Freud convince us that we are never in total command and that undercurrent forces are in perpetual motion to regulate or create chaos, as the case may be. Jung is not infallible, but he does offer sound reason for disruption of the personality, that is, when the personality is divided and becomes more than one entity:

As long as all goes well and psychic energy finds its application in adequate and well-regulated ways, we are disturbed by nothing from within. No uncertainty or doubt besets us, and we cannot be divided against ourselves. But no sooner are one or two channels of psychic activity blocked, than we are reminded of a stream that is damned up. The current flows backward to its source; the inner man wants something which the visible man does not want, and we are at war with ourselves.⁴

The division of the psyche is a subject which stirs much literary imagination, being an intensely personal and intimate experience which enriches an understanding of the self. It becomes clear, during the course of our study, that there are different kinds of doubles, although Albert J. Guerard, in his introduction to Stories of the Double, describes a Jungian kind of division, that is, the need to

reconcile "our profoundest antinomies of spirit and most opposed modes of being: on the one hand the social, ethical, conscious, rational, institutional (with all the comforts these bring) and on the other the individual, free, irrational, unconscious, atavistic (with all the life energies these signify)."⁵ The division into a "day self" and a "shadow self" takes on a sinister hue in "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," a powerful dramatization of a split personality where the antimonies seem irreconcilable because so extreme. The subversive self is indeed damnable in this case, but one wonders if its existence may not be due to severe and prolonged repression. In Dostoevsky's "The Double," the division is not sinister though the identification is uncanny. The younger Golyadkin seems to be a figment of the older Golyadkin's imagination, for the former turns out to be an usurper while at the same time becoming everything that the older one has ever dreamed of, successful, self-assured. "Bartleby, the Scrivener" by Herman Melville tells of yet another kind of double story, for Bartleby's perennial, insistent and unwavering "I would prefer not to" is quiet but uncompromising criticism, nay, judgement of the narrator's soul-destroying mundane existence, characterised by his steady and dull job. While it is not necessary to examine these fascinating stories in detail, it is evident that doubles take diverse and various forms, performing different functions according to the individual's needs. The variations on the theme can be played ad infinitum: there is the case of domination by the double, one may disown one's double or one may become demoralized and immobilized by the other self. There seems to be generally a tendency to depreciate the shadow self (because society disapproves of it) and to allow it only

subversive existence. It is a rather curious development, for according to Otto Rank, the concept of the duality of man's nature has been recognised since primitive times and that originally the double was regarded as an identical self, a shadow which promised personal survival in the future, that is, guaranteeing immortality,⁶ but later, "he became an opposing self, appearing in the form of evil which represents the perishable and mortal part of the personality repudiated by the social self."⁷

Conrad shows his interest in doubles not only in "The Secret Sharer", The Shadow Line and The Nigger of the "Narcissus" which are undisguisedly psychological, but also in many of his other works. Doubles abound, although they are not always obvious. Identification between men, sympathies between complementary natures externalize what is internal and obscure. Jim's identification with Gentleman Brown is instantaneous and obsessive as he recognizes his inferior self in Brown, a bond he cannot abjure. Razumov and Haldin are complementary to one another, though one is intensely intellectual and bourgeois while the other is romantic and idealistic. When Razumov betrays Haldin, causing his death, he has indeed denied part of his own personality, thus maiming himself. His subsequent agony and suffering are unavoidable, as a maimed spirit cannot lead a normal existence. The drama of the double is usually concerned with self-discovery and self-revelation, but such knowledge often yields negative results as the protagonist becomes overwhelmed and immobilized by it. Thus Marlow experiences a period of physical and spiritual immobilization after Kurtz's death before he emerges into the world with greater wisdom. Jim's paralysis in his dealing with Brown reaches a high dramatic

intensity in the novel, for he sacrifices his life as a consequence; however, the confrontation finally drives home the impossibility of living on an illusion, in this instance, the illusion of a romantic existence. As double or as "one of us," the case of the other self is an intriguing one.

"The Secret Sharer" is one of the most, if not the most, overtly psychological of Conrad's works on the alienated self. The symbolic suggestions and overtones are so multifarious in this short story that it is quite possible to interpret it as "the classic night journey and willed descent into the unconscious."⁸ The action is about the deliberate encounter with the hidden self, done through a process of introspection, but dramatised, the process is full of suspense and hidden horrors. The story is definitely enriched by the psychological level, there being no doubt that the author invites involvement in this area through his many clues in the narrative. Stated simply, "The Secret Sharer" concerns itself with a classic case: the narrator, freshly and suddenly in command of a ship, suffers from a sense of insecurity and uncertainty which is potentially paranoid. The problem is stated matter-of-factly but the implications are immensely subtle and serious. The untried captain makes an explicit statement:

But what I felt most was my being a stranger to the ship; and if all the truth must be told, I was somewhat of a stranger to myself. The youngest man on board (barring the second mate), and untried as yet by a position of the fullest responsibility, I was willing to take the adequacy of the others for granted. They had simply to be equal to their tasks; but I wondered how far I should turn out faithful to that ideal conception of one's own personality every man sets up for himself secretly.

Some but not all of the nagging sense of alienation emerges into consciousness as the narrator is not fully aware of his problem until

it faces him squarely. But even in his quiet musings he is already aware of a sense of loss, of displacement, besides being burdened by an apprehension of the true fact of one's nature. To use Jungian concepts, psychic disruption occurs when one or more channels of psychic activity is dammed up. In other words, division within the personality happens when the different facets go their own way, being no longer integrated as an entity. In the narrator's case, the anxiety and doubts brought about by a strange and unexpected situation (the command of a ship) highlight a more basic malady within the personality, hitherto non-evident. The full revelation of the malady is possible only in that certain environment where confrontation with the inner self is inevitable, but until such an event occurs, it is easy to be lulled into a false sense of security. Thus, ironically, the narrator-captain consoles himself with the "untempted life" of the sea, "presenting no disquieting problems" (107) just before the fish-like Leggatt emerges from it, a concrete evidence to counteract the deceptions of the conscious mind.

The dual existence of the narrator, dramatised vividly, occupies the centre of the stage for the most part. Symbolically, the self is subversively divided in two with the shadow leading an illicit existence. Leggatt's existence is intended to convey the malady in the narrator's psychological make-up. The narrator is responsible for fishing Leggatt from the sea, indeed can be held accountable for his very existence on the ship. He has broken convention by taking the night-watch himself, and as a result of his order, a ladder is left hanging. The coincidence of the meeting is marvelous when one notes that the identification between the two is also immediate and complete:

"A mysterious communication was established already between us two -- in the face of that silent, darkened tropical sea" (110). The meeting is almost anticipated, awaited for and is held without the least surprise. As Leggatt is made later to comment, "And then you speaking to me so quietly -- as if you had expected me --" (123) and "You seem to have been there on purpose" (147), the whole affair takes on the air of a quiet conspiracy. One needs not worry about reading too much into this because all is made explicit. The narrator calls Leggatt his "double", his "own reflection" (113) his "second self," "the unsuspected sharer of my cabin" (130), all through the short story. The identification and intimacy cannot be more profound or natural. The narrator's state of mind following Leggatt's appearance on board is revealing, for it is almost a pathological state. The double existence disables the narrator because he is living with a perpetual lie and also he is not all himself. He is in a nervous, excited state as well as being plagued with fatigue, with "the confused sensation of being in two places at once" (124). The division within himself is detrimental to his command of the ship; he is unable to summon an instinctive alertness because "I was not wholly alone with my command; for there was that stranger in my cabin. . . . Part of me was absent" (139). Unable to do his duty, he is moreover perpetuating the mistrust of his officers and crew which can create a real menace indeed in a sea situation. These are, however, symptoms of a more serious illness, the alienation of the self, resulting in the inability to command all of one's faculties. It is a torturous affliction indeed to be neither here nor there. The narrator is aware of the signs of an impending disaster: "I think I had come creeping quietly as near insanity as any man who has not

actually gone over the border" (144).

The nature of the relationship between Leggatt and the captain is an intriguing one, especially the illicit aspect of it. The unconscious is not to be trifled with, especially if it contains secrets not approved by society. Leggatt is summoned from the darkness and the deep, steps into the narrator's sleeping suit and retreats to the recess part of the cabin, invisible to all. The invisibility of Leggatt is significant for it indicates that the problem is intensely personal. In a moment of agony, the narrator cries out, ". . . an irresistible doubt of his bodily existence flitted through my mind. Can it be, I asked myself, that he is not visible to other eyes than mine? It was like being haunted" (144). Leggatt has to be concealed, even though the narrator is not exactly ashamed of him. As he insists repeatedly, Leggatt is his potential, and in his mind, he understands his motivations entirely. There is both respect and admiration for Leggatt but still he has to be hidden in the most secret part of his cabin for the reason that society is against them: "The Sunday quietness of the ship was against us; the elements, the men were against us -- everything was against us in our secret partnership; time itself -- for this could not go on for ever" (137). It could be posited that it is the two against society, which condemns because it is unable to handle marginal crimes. Leggatt has to disappear like Lord Jim because he will never be exonerated by a society epitomised by the "moral" captain of ^{the} "Sephora." From the individual's point of view, crime is complex if you take into account extenuating circumstances and attitudes, or as Leggatt says, "What can they know whether I am guilty or not -- or of what I am guilty, either? That's my affair" (146). The fact remains that Leggatt has

killed a man out of fury and temper and is not suitably repentant. His uncontrollable temper is evident from his own speech while narrating his escape, "Somebody else might have got killed" (118) and "Somebody would have got killed for certain" (121). Complementary to his tempestuous personality is his calmness, and contradictorily, his self control. In contrast to the captain, he is in "full possession of his senses," never panics in the precarious situation and to the captain's great admiration, "he looked always perfectly self-controlled, more than calm -- almost invulnerable" (141). Clearly then, Leggatt is self-sustaining and self-assured, mainly because he is not bound to society as the captain is. He is a free spirit, free to come and to go, "As I came at night so I shall go" (146).

What Leggatt represents precisely has created much speculation among the critics. It is reasonable to postulate that Leggatt is part of the narrator, his shadow perhaps. Guérard would see him as "a more interior outlaw-self that repudiated law and tradition,"¹⁰ while John A. Palmer denies Leggatt one iota of rationality because he symbolically lacks a head, is fishlike, sub-rational and animal-like in his alertness and calmness.¹¹ Of course, Leggatt does identify with Cain, who committed the first fratricide, although both are ready to pay for their crimes: "The 'brand of Cain' business, don't you see? That's all right. I was ready enough to go off wandering on the face of the earth -- and that was price enough to pay for an Abel of that sort" (119). It may be the same sub-rational impulse that controls both but unlike Cain, Leggatt has not premeditated the murder. Yelton tries to justify him:

His act was lawless in the formal sense that he took the law into his own hands; but his manslaughter is presented as the involuntary outcome of an original act of volition (the order to reef a foresail) which saves the ship -- it is the tragic overplus of heroic impulse. There is in him an excess of Plato's 'spirited element', which we can (as the captain does, Leggatt acquiescing) call by the simpler word 'temper'.¹²

The moral evaluation is finally not the most important because Leggatt exists outside the pale of society and thus is not to be judged by society's tenets. The narrator-captain is fully attuned to him and sees him more as a heroic figure than an inferior self. Leggatt is more than anything instinctive, and instinct is neutral until it produces a morally reprehensible act. The captain observes the operation of pure instinct in his double, who is calm and collected because unperturbed by any social role; he does not have to live the role of a captain. The pure freedom embodied by Leggatt is both exhilarating and stifling as the captain discovers, and thus, though he accepts Leggatt totally and with the utmost familiarity, he is also aware that the instinctive self should not dominate his personality. The assimilation of an instinctive confidence is exactly what the narrator needs, and Leggatt provides him with the opportunity to conduct the crucial test of accepting the instinctive self. The last brave act of standing by Leggatt is such an act, for by risking all, his promising career, his crew, his ship, in bringing the ship as close to the land as possible to increase Leggatt's chance of survival, he is demonstrating that supreme bond of sympathy as well as assuring himself that he has fully accepted himself, the best stance to combat danger.

The full integration of the personality achieved at the end is logical and expected. The captain does not have to worry if he can

be "faithful to that ideal conception of one's own personality" (104). In a word, he no longer has to doubt his own capabilities and reactions. He may never be able to live up to that ideal conception, but he has accepted his own strengths and weaknesses, has even seen himself as a potential murderer, a fugitive from society, and yet by seeing both the light and the shadow he can say, "Nothing! no one in the world should stand now between us, throwing a shadow on the way of silent knowledge and mute affection; the perfect communion of a seaman with his first command" (158-9). The harmony within himself is reflected in his reconciliation with his surroundings; his self command extends into command of his ship and men. The freedom from self-doubt paves the way to freedom to engage himself with the outer rather than the inner world.

The Shadow Line, written seven years after "The Secret Sharer", is closely related in theme and symbolism because both are drawn from the same sea experience, Conrad's unexpected first command, for which he seems to have an inexhaustible fascination because of the psychological and spiritual problems inherent in it. Like "The Secret Sharer," the later novel focusses on the isolation and loneliness of a first command, a particularly stressful period of life because "green youth" or inexperience has to carry such awesome responsibility. The young captain exultingly and instinctively realises his role: "In that community I stood, like a king in his country, in a class all by myself. . . . I was brought there to rule by an agency as remote from the people and as inscrutable almost to them as the Grace of God."¹³ With such an illustrious sense of his mission the captain will also be bound by an equally burdensome sense of responsibility. Concomitant

with the responsibility of command which is always challenging and sometimes crippling, there is, in this case, another kind of challenge to the captain, the need to come to terms with himself. Basically the conflict centers on the necessity to arrive at the knowledge of himself as apart from any romantic or illusory conceptions. Throughout the novel the protagonist is preoccupied with whether he is good enough, and sensitive to any suggestion to the contrary. The anxieties and fears attendant on this state are psychological, and the paralysis experienced in the interim period between uncertainty and assurance is thus crucial, for its prolonged existence is necessarily injurious and may be permanently crippling. The captain in "The Secret Sharer" goes through a night journey, or in clinical terms, conducts an introspection into the self, while his counterpart in The Shadow Line goes through essentially the same thing. The narrative level of the story neatly complements the symbolic level, for the calmness of the sea, the sickness and other narrative details reflect the captain's internal state, as external nature is artistically utilized to dramatise and highlight the inner doubts and anxieties of the protagonist.

The author characterizes the drama of self-confrontation as crossing the shadow line from youth, "carefree and fervent, to the more self-conscious and more poignant period of maturer life."¹⁴ It is the process of passing from the certainties and idealism of youth with its "beautiful continuity of hope which knows no pauses and no introspection" (3) to the maturer conception of duty and sense of community. Carl Benson puts it another way, calling it "the passage from egocentric youth to human solidarity."¹⁵ These different states of mind do not necessarily characterize particular chronological ages but they certainly

express specific psychic moods. The inertia and disillusion felt before and during the command point to a personal and deep-seated problem, one which is not essentially ameliorated by a sense of "human solidarity." I suggest that although the captain later pays tribute to the crew, assuring them of his "undying regard," the focus of the spiritual dilemma is not so much on the relationship of captain and crew as that of captain and himself, though the latter affects all in its immediate environ. In other words, the perspective should be psychological rather than ethical or moral, though critics like Benson would emphasize the "awakening of the captain's humanity" or his social awareness, a movement from "his irresponsibility at the opening to his tolerant respect for others at the end."¹⁶ The critic concludes the moral at the end is that "the proudest self must come to terms with the material conditions of earth and men, . . . that true courage may be modulated by resignation."¹⁷ One would not deny that the lesson of humanity is present in the novel except to emphasize that it is subservient to the more important spiritual voyage of the self which has been transmuted from concrete experience. Indeed, as Conrad himself has pointed out in a letter to Colvin, "that experience [has been] transposed into spiritual terms"¹⁸ so that the ethical aspect of it becomes subjected to an exploration of the psychic rather than the moral needs of man. From the beginning the spotlight is on the young man, for the calm, the sickness and threat of death are screened by his sensibility and their effects measured by his perspective. Analysed, the feelings carried over to the command are those of disillusion, ennui and an affliction of paralysis to be compounded later by a sense of guilt and preoccupation with death.

In the first part of the novel, which details the incidents leading to the endowment of an unexpected command, the young man is already beset by problematical moods. He has thrown off a promising berth in a whim, is "discontented, disgusted, and dogged" (7) and has never "felt more detached from all earthly goings on" (19). Suddenly all past experiences become worthless, "The past eighteen months, so full of new and varied experience, appeared a dreary, prosaic waste of days. I felt -- how shall I express it? -- that there was no truth to be got out of them" (7). All indications are that he becomes suddenly disillusioned by his work, although his seems to be mighty promising. His unaccountable weariness and boredom proceed from "The green sickness of late youth" (5). It seems that he fears to grow into maturity and become like the others, a nonentity, albeit a very efficient one. He rebels against the damming of his dreams, the illusions of youth which are unlimited and exhilarating. In this state of unfulfilment he becomes disgusted at everyone and everything; his detachment is expressed through an obtuseness in his conversations with Captain Giles who penetrates through his uncertainty and intends to help him. To Giles' murky suggestions of a possible command he can only respond with lassitude, resentment and universal condemnation:

The whole thing strengthened in me that obscure feeling of life being a waste of days, which, half-unconsciously, had driven me out of a comfortable berth, away from men I liked, to flee from the menace of emptiness. . . .

A great discouragement fell on me. A spiritual drowsiness. Giles' voice was going on complacently; the very voice of the universal hollow conceit. . . . There was nothing original, nothing new, startling, informing to expect from the world: no opportunities to find out something about oneself, no wisdom to acquire, no fun to enjoy. Everything was stupid and overrated, even Captain Giles was. So be it. (23)

The ennui and disillusion are evident in his estrangement from his surroundings and his inability to know what is going on. He has willed himself into this blind indifference. Call it what you will, "an immobilizing neurotic depression"¹⁹ or "an existential crisis"²⁰ the youth is afflicted by it. He is at once sensitive and alert to covert suggestions of his being no good, of "going soft" and yet he is spiritually lethargic and detached, unable to rouse himself, benumbed by unspecified doubts and fears.

The euphoria experienced at the surprise bestowal of the command only gives temporary relief, though a very exhilarating one. Doubtless he congratulates himself on his own impetuosity in throwing up his berth for the magic of command, a fulfilment of his romantic dreams, especially satisfying because unanticipated: "A strange sense of exultation began to creep into me. If I had worked for that command ten years or more there would have been nothing of the kind" (36). His elation allows him to forget his spiritual numbness, but the problem is not alleviated but submerged. In fact his detachment becomes even more pronounced though he mistakenly regards his estrangement as ecstasy: "And nothing in the way of abstraction could have equalled my deep detachment from the forms and colours of this world; It was, as it were, absolute" (35). When he sees his ship he regards her as 'disengaged from the material conditions of her being' (50). However, his separation from reality or his reluctance to tackle that "feeling of life-emptiness" (49) which has previously beset him ensures perpetuation of the problem. He imagines that all his troubles are over, and is thus freshly annoyed when he finds his work impeded by a crew laid helpless with tropical fever. Like the captain of "The Secret

Sharer" he deceptively puts his faith in the sea as the great cure-all. His escapism furthers itself in a conception of the sea as "pure, safe, and friendly," and "the only remedy for all my troubles" (71). This self-delusion manifests itself through his impatiencē to wait, his eagerness to be gone, against better advice, from that which has previously imprisoned his spirit.

The fusion of narrative and symbolic content is effectively illustrated by the sea voyage. The calm of the sea interrupted by sporadic and unseasonal winds, coupled with the return of the fever to the crew, characterize the narrator's psychological state. His euphoria is superseded by the more deep-seated anxiety, which now expresses itself in his relation to his ship and his ability, or lack of it, to command. The "life-emptiness" he has previously experienced intensifies and assumes a more menacing form because the issue has become more immediate, a matter of survival. The man is put under a test, as it were. The sea is no cure-all, for in symbolic language, the sea reflects the psyche, as it is made to do in this case. The external obstacles mirror the internal crisis just as the outer calm corresponds to the inner inertia and paralysis. Dissected, the problem is one of control or command, and one is made to sense that the narrator-captain is neither in control of the ship nor in command of himself. He feels strange to be among his sailors, "like a long-lost wanderer among his kin" (73). Like the ship which cannot be navigated, the man himself is unable to shake off this paralysis. Part of the cause of this lack of control or ability to co-ordinate the whole being is the feeling of intense loneliness which is caused by more than the onus of responsibility; "The intense loneliness of the sea acted like poison on my brain"(92)¹.

The loneliness is that of every individual who has to account to himself. Compounding the sense of alienation from the rest of society is the captain's sense of guilt. Because of his inability to understand what is going on, namely, the sickness, the dead calm, the sporadic winds, he feels persecuted and haunted, laying on himself additional guilt feelings since he holds himself directly responsible. It is a kind of superstitious feeling that he has somehow to pay for his luck in getting the command: " . . . I had yet an uneasy feeling that such luck as this has got perhaps to be paid for in some way" (83). The conviction intensifies when catastrophes heap on one another. The quinine episode provides an adequate illustration. He feels immensely guilty for failing to check the quinine bottles properly and expects reproach from the crew and is surprised when there is none. He even has guilt feelings for being healthy while the rest is afflicted. The persecution complex pursues him, convincing him that he is the target of some colossal joke, or as he says in frustration, "Only purposeful malevolence could account for [his misfortune]" (87).

The guilt emotions, he later reveals, originate from his own feelings of inadequacy. However, the issue is rather complex as evidenced by the atmosphere of death and the references to the supernatural. Burns voices overtly what lurks surreptitiously in the captain's mind, that is, the threat of some supernatural evil. Burns finds the supreme embodiment of evil in the late captain whose idiosyncracies lead him to repudiate self-command and command of the ship. The young captain is potentially inclined to believe Burns, making some outside force responsible for his misfortunes, though he would not concede to it consciously. In moments of self-confrontation, the captain

envisions death all around him, although he cannot discern the source of the menace. The haunt of death is present in more than the spectral figure of Burns; it is always there in the captain's imagination:

"Perhaps my appalling vision of a ship floating with a dead crew would become a reality for the discovery weeks afterwards by some horror-stricken mariners" (103), or "When I turned my eyes to the ship, I had a morbid vision of her as a floating grave. Who hasn't heard of ships found drifting, haphazard, with their crews all dead?" (92). Through the most stressful part of the ordeal, he has been engulfed with a sense of mortality, of being unable to emerge whole from the experience:

"I did not expect, in colloquial phrase, 'to come out of it'." (106) Mortality is fearful because it shows up man's incompleteness and vulnerability. The captain is understandably obsessed by this fear. The "life-emptiness" he has earlier felt translates into a despair with himself, his incompleteness. When he articulates the problem, he does it with precision and lucidity:

And what appals me most of all is that I shrink from going on deck to face it. It's due to the ship, it's due to the men who are there on deck -- some of them, ready to put out the last remnant of their strength at a word from me. And I am shrinking from it. From the mere vision. My first command. Now I understand that strange sense of insecurity in my past. I always suspected that I might be no good. And here is proof positive, I am shirking it, I am no good. (106)

The existential crisis comes to a climax in that anguished cry, "I am no good." The symptoms of obsessive despair, guilt and preoccupation with death spring from this basic conflict with the self, the reluctance of the idealistic or romantic self to co-exist with an inferior, weak and vulnerable other self. The confrontation is disabling, resulting in inertia and visions of paralysis and death.

If you would have it, the captain has a sick³ soul, symbolically manifested in the sickness around him. There are, however, few sicknesses without a cure, and in this case, the healing power radiates from Ransome. Ransome and Burns can be seen as complementary to the captain's nature, for while Burns has a generally disturbing effect on the captain in his spectral appearance and his battle with supernatural evil, Ransome has a calming effect. The cook carries about with him "something very fragile or very explosive" (73), namely, a weak heart, but he is "soothing" to others, moving around in benevolent munificence: "That man noticed everything, attended to everything, shed comfort around him as he moved" (121). Yet, with the threat of death poised over him, he is not immobilized but on the contrary exerts all that he has in the struggle against the hostile environment. Ransome can be seen as the captain's double, complementary to him because of his undaunting spirit. Benson sums it up succinctly when he says that Ransome is "employed significantly to emphasize the opposition of a sick heart, or soul, in a sound body and ^a sound soul in a sick body."²¹ Ransome plays his part in the dramatic narrative when he gives the captain the necessary nudge to overcome the inertia and get to where the action is. The call of inertia, of oblivion is still strong and attractive: "The quietness that came over me was like a foretaste of annihilation. It gave me a sort of comfort, as though my soul had become suddenly reconciled to an eternity of blind stillness" (108). The call of death is strong but the instinct to survive can submerge that death wish. What the narrator-captain has to learn is that like Ransome, he has to co-exist with the threat of death, with the awareness of vulnerability. This self-knowledge must also come with independence,

the necessity that man exists in himself. The darkness of loneliness is only ameliorated by knowledge or consciousness. This crisis of knowledge is etched powerfully in the novel, when the ship is surrounded by darkness and silence, while the captain's consciousness provides the running commentary: "Such must have been the darkness before creation. It had closed behind me. I knew I was invisible to the man at the helm. Neither could I see anything. He was alone, I was alone, every man was alone where he stood. And every form was gone, too, spar, sail, fittings, masts; everything was blotted out in the dreadful smoothness of that absolute night" (113). After the primeval darkness where each man confronts himself comes the catharsis, the purification in the form of a downpour: "Well, suddenly the darkness turned into water. . . . A heavy shower, a downpour, comes along, making a noise. You hear its approach on the sea, in the air too, I verily believe" (114). The crisis is over, for symbolically, the water is a kind of baptism preparing him for a new active life.

The journey to port is short of being miraculous as the captain manages it almost single-handed. The transformation brought about by self-knowledge and reconciliation with mortality endows the captain with the powers to survive. The ship obeys him as his self does and he is in control, serenely alone. "She's a ship without a crew,"⁶³ (123), requiring all the more effort from the captain. He also works in co-operation with Ransome until, he, too, is needed no more. The ordeal, in a way, marks his arrival at maturity, his crossing the shadow line. What this amounts to is also apparent at the end; his is no longer a stultified spirit, for liberation has come with the recognition that life is not all power and glory, that perhaps, most

of it is a mundane struggle, as Captain Giles says: " . . . a man should stand up to his bad luck, to his mistakes, to his conscience, and all that sort of thing. Why -- what else would you have to fight against?"(132)

Captain Giles proffers the most balanced view to young, romantic captains. In both "The Secret Sharer" and The Shadow Line, the root of the trouble lies in the tension between feelings of inadequacy (which in turn breeds guilt feelings because of fear of failure) and aspiration to greatness, the matter of measuring oneself against the ideals. The balanced view is also the adult one, dispensing with exaggerated hopes and fears. However, the dreams of youth are potent, epitomising the precarious balance of the psyche, with its secrets and demands. The works discussed in this chapter focus on this precarious balance, on the danger of being too much lured by the murky side of one's character to the detriment of the whole personality. Although both captains eventually reach a state of control, there is no absolute guarantee that it will be a permanent state, but that is, however, not eminently desirable. What is desirable is an understanding of the self, which is a necessity and a challenge.

CHAPTER IV

THE NAKED TERROR OF LONELINESS

In Conrad's "psychological" works, such as the ones discussed in the previous chapter, images of darkness abound. Darkness, from man's viewpoint, is blind, amorphous, intangible and overwhelming because it is a force not understood. In The Shadow Line such a force, likened to "the darkness before creation" (113), a formless mass, seems to overwhelm all and separate each man from the others. The ship, at significant points, is surrounded by darkness which symbolically reflects the darkness around, and more potently, the darkness within each. The image of darkness effectively communicates the fear of utter loneliness, which cuts man^{off} from all, his external environment and his innermost self. He questions his own subjective consciousness because it no longer accommodates faith. As Hillis Miller says:

Man has killed God by separating his subjectivity from everything but itself. The ego has put everything in doubt, and has defined all outside itself as the object of its thinking power. When God and the creation become objects of consciousness, man becomes a nihilist. Nihilism is the nothingness of consciousness when consciousness becomes the foundation of everything.¹

Man is no longer able to comprehend his spiritual surroundings, and he views fate as an inexorable power, working in mysterious ways. Turning inward, he can only see sordidness and destructiveness. The soul of humanity is not pretty to look at, as Marlow, Conrad's reliable narrator, has discovered. Conrad's characters, who conduct sessions of introspection, those innumerable night-journeys, confirm this dis-

covery. Kurtz, Razumov and Falk commit, each in his own way, unpardonable crimes, but perhaps the common denominator among them is the animalism which exudes from Falk. His is a will to survival and power, originating from the ego. Too often, grovelling lust and drive for self-fulfillment also spring from the ego, which is darkness. Like Golding's choir boys who soon degenerate into bestiality, these Conradian characters cannot rid themselves of the seed of corruption. But the real nature of the power eludes even keen observers like Marlow, who, viewing this immensity called the heart of mankind, says, "I wondered whether the stillness of the face of the immensity looking at us two were meant as an appeal or a menace. What were we who had strayed in here? Could we handle that dumb thing, or would it handle us? I felt how big, how confoundedly big, was that thing that couldn't talk and perhaps was deaf as well. What was in there?" (Heart of Darkness, 37) Paradoxically, the immensity is silent, dumb and deaf, or neutral, and the heart of darkness originates of such amorphous substance. Of itself the immensity is stagnant, but once activated, its vibrant demonic energy is set to wreak havoc and horror.

The nature of the demonic power within man is investigated in The Nigger of the "Narcissus" where the ship is conceived as a microcosm, reflecting the essence of the human struggle. The dramatic events of the novel, centering around the living through of storms and also the saving of the ship and its community are meaningful only in relation to the personality of James Wait. The enigmatic negro shamming sickness seems to have an unaccountable power over the crew. He is, as Conrad himself has indicated, the ship's collective psyche,² and hence, the crew's experiences with him are tinged with an uncanny

intimacy. The men are pulled in two ways, by the negro who had "the secret of life,"³ but who encourages dissent, disunity, and by the code which seamen live by, demanding hard work, loyalty and a sense of dedication. In the novel, the opposition is symmetrically laid out: the benign forces, headed by Captain Allistoun, (who like a god, "seldom descended from the Olympian heights of his poop"⁴), have the support of exemplary Singleton while the evil powers are incarnated in James Wait and his Cockney accomplice, Donkin. The opposing forces are irreconcilable, and though they are perennally at a deadlock, the struggle does not surface except at climatic moments. The object of the struggle is the soul of the crew, which is so drawn to Wait that it imperils its own welfare. Conrad is quite specific in delineating the tension between the collective shadow self (with all its secrets) and the collective social self, bound by the precautions which ensure community survival.

The crew's obsession with the ominous presence of James Wait is reflected in the narrator's obsession. The narrator, who starts off as an impersonal one, eventually identifies with the rest of the crew, and sporadically but compulsively views Wait as an evil influence. In fact the unevenness of narration is indicative of his obsession with James Wait; he seems unable to withhold the deluge occasioned by the mere remembrance of the negro. The description of the first announcement of Wait's illness is followed by a tirade on Wait, the threat and spiritual intimidation posed by him, which, of course, anticipates the knowledge they will gradually acquire (36). The gnawing doubts which plague the men concern the reality of the negro; they cannot be sure of the truth of his statements or be convinced of

the reality of his existence though at times they allow themselves to be deceived. From the first, Wait's voice is described as "metallic, hollow, and tremendously loud" (18), "hollow and loud, as though he had been talking in an empty cavern" (35). Like Kurtz, Wait is a hollow man, for he, "that black phantom" (151), leads a "sham existence," though without being less of a menace for that: the "hollow, moaning, whistling sounds filled the cabin with a vague mutter full of menace, complaint and desolation, like the far off murmur of a rising wind" (151). Sometimes, of course, Wait seems like a phantom, a figment of the imagination, grotesque and absurd, a parody of the substantial. The crew's oscillation between "pity and mistrust" (36), pity for human suffering, the onslaught of death and fear of deception is only part of the ambiguity of response to Wait. Wait, for them, is complex and chimerical because he elicits too many contradictory responses. There is no doubt that he has cast "an infernal spell" (37), being a tormentor "worse than a nightmare" (44). Definitely demoralizing, he sows the seed of self-doubt and anarchistic tendencies in everyone as well. The crew is silenced, becoming mute because of Jimmy, and distrust of each other is fostered because of the fascination with the negro. Comrad^eship and personal integrity are undermined and even though the threat is evident, there is no preventing it taking its full course. Often the reader is inclined to associate Wait with some evil influence, what with his symbolic blackness and hollowness. The narrator himself confirms this suspicion by viewing Wait as an insinuating power, aligned with the evil forces: "He seemed to hasten the retreat of departing light by his very presence; the setting sun dipped sharply, as though fleeing before our nigger; a black mist emanated

from him, a subtle and dismal influence, a something cold and gloomy that floated out and settled on all the faces like a mourning veil" (34).

Indubitably, Wait is a burden on their conscience, "that pitiful, that limp, that hateful burden" (72), but somehow the sailors all have a share of him. Their empathy for and fear of him indicate intimacy, something they hate to admit. From the first, Wait belongs to the ship, and is part of it, and the men are responsible for creating him. Wait is the men. Significantly, the narrator recognises the insubstantiality of James Wait, "He did not like to be alone in his cabin, because, when he was alone, it seemed to him as if he hadn't been there at all. There was nothing" (148).

Wait is functional not in his own existence but in the ambiguous responses he elicits from the crew. He lords over them, intimidating their very souls because they allow it to happen. Though absolutely contradictory to their own professional ethics, Wait's shirking irresponsibility and total disregard for the welfare of the ship are viewed with indulgence, if not admiration. The ^{crux}~~nexus~~ of the problem is a matter of what comes first, the individual or the ship, and Wait unilaterally decides that his contribution to the ship, which is the only source of sustenance and security in that little world, is his shamming. Such egoistic mentality not only undermines solidarity but aims directly at destroying communal existence, but it is contagious for soon the crew begin to be obsessed by their own importance. Having weathered the storm and proven themselves, they are gnawed by a "vague and burning desire" (104), for great things presumably, though they find themselves inarticulate when questioned. The captain's viewpoint quells any such sentiments. They are there to serve the

ship and they can never be good enough:

"Enough!" cried the master. He stood scanning them for a moment, then walking a few steps this way and that began to storm at them coldly, in gusts violent and cutting like the gales of those icy seas that had known his youth. -- "Tell you what's the matter? Too big for your boots. Think yourself damn good men. Know half your work. Do half your duty. Think it too much. If you did ten times as much it wouldn't be enough." (134)

Given the alternatives of complete individual freedom or the safety of the entire crew, the crew find the facade of choice meaningless. Nonetheless, they continue to be fascinated by Wait and the suggestion of other-worldliness about him. The secret is bound with the preoccupation with sickness and death, that uncharted region resembling the innermost recesses of the human mind. Wait holds the secret because he has the aura of this superior knowledge, and thus, though demoralizing, he is humanizing as well. The humanizing effect derives from a recognition of those weaknesses which might discredit the validity of society but which are essentially and basically human. In a key passage, these intimations are presented:

He was unique, and as fascinating as only something inhuman could be; he seemed to shout his denials already from beyond the awful border. He was becoming immaterial like an apparition; . . . He was demoralizing. Through him we were becoming highly humanized, tender, complex, excessively decadent: we understood the subtlety of his fear, sympathized with all his repulsions, shrinkings, evasions, delusions. . . . (139)

The men of the "Narcissus" are to relinquish their obsession with James Wait when they emerge from their experience with him. Wait as enigma, mystery or pest has to be forgotten in favour of exigencies. The burden will be buried at sea, or driven back to the preconscious, and the men, previously so implicated, will forget the nightmarish

experience, their brush with death, to reaffirm the code of the seamen which is synonymous with Conrad's "latent feeling of fellowship with all creation -- and . . . the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, . . . the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity -- the dead to the living and the living to the unborn."⁵ The communal ideal is the saving grace in the case of the "Narcissus". The ship saves the men from indulging in too much narcissistic introspection, and it is significant that during the storm, James Wait is entirely forgotten as the men fight to save the ship and themselves. It is only after the restoration of calm that the seamen remember Wait is shut up prematurely, as in a coffin, and his rescue of course means his resurrection, the reinstatement of his ominous power over the crew. The incident serves to summarize the moral focus of the novel, for the saving grace is the ameliorative effect of the illusion of communal welfare. Though, at the finale, the narrator sentimentally declares that they have "wrung out a meaning from our sinful lives" (173), we are not quite sure what that meaning is. Their reward lies in that glorious toil, the courage, loyalty and blind obedience of subordinates, virtues embodied by that grand old Singleton. If work is the answer, the means to prevent spiritual anarchy and dampen egoistic dreams, it will be a practical solution. It will also be to some extent repressive as a hierarchical system inevitably must be. Kept under rule and discipline, it is always possible to put community first. However, community is an illusion like other illusions and the ambiguity present is finally suspended, not resolved.

Can we not question the validity of the illusion when it presents itself as an illusion and nothing more? If the shadow life was at times elusive, the day life too could be viewed as imaginary, part of a dream. The narrator sometimes gives this feeling, as when nothing seems real, not even the source of security, the ship:

In the magnificence of the phantom rays the ship appeared pure like a vision of ideal beauty, illusive like a tender dream of serene peace. And nothing in her was real, nothing was distinct and solid but the heavy shadows that filled her decks with their unceasing and noiseless stir: the shadows darker than the night and more restless than the thoughts of men. (145)

Neither the workaday world nor the enigmatic psychic region maintains its durable stronghold in the novel. Both are subject to detraction, mockery, irony as well as seriousness. The narrative tone is never entirely consistent, although there is a pattern to it, outlining the test, the victory and the reaffirmation of the moral code. The linear progression, however, does not successfully submerge and absorb the suggestions developed along the way, expressed most potently in the ambiguous if not confused attitude to James Wait. Courage, sense of duty, and solidarity triumph to preserve the ship and the men who might otherwise be disintegrated, if not annihilated by that glimpse of truth. The situation is parallel to Marlow's in Heart of Darkness, for he, too, needs a saving illusion. In that dream-like atmosphere where nothing seems real because so elusive, Marlow yearns for a tangible foothold -- specifically, ridiculously, rivets, with which he can get to work. The frenzy with which he clamours for them denotes the panic of his spirit: "What I really wanted was rivets, by heaven! Rivets. To get on with the work -- to stop the hole. Rivets I wanted

. . . what I wanted was a quantity of rivets -- and rivets were what really Mr. Kurtz wanted, if he had only known it."⁶ The show must go on, the pretence be prolonged if only to preserve sanity. Marlow continues with his exposition on the virtues of work, half-conscious perhaps of being a fraud: "I don't like work -- no man does -- but I like what is in the work -- the chance to find yourself. You own reality -- for yourself, not for others -- what no other man can ever know. They can only see the mere show, and never^{can} tell what it really means."⁷ The reality referred to is that by which the severance from this earth, from the rest of human kind is made more difficult. It is the link of the individual to the rest, the quality which enables man to survive hostile ambience.

Carried to the extreme such a hold on reality blinds men, rendering them unimaginative and wholly practical. Such a case is found in Falk, that "eater of man" to whom the exigencies of survival triumph over certain human "decencies," and his cannibalism is extenuated by the explanation that it was a mere expediency. His will to survive surmounts all other considerations, and though he realizes that untried society would hardly exonerate him, his duty first and foremost is to ensure his own survival. Falk is perhaps imaginative enough to glimpse the horror of his act, but his imagination does not stretch far enough for him to comprehend the implications thereof. The saving grace of illusion is munificent indeed, for whatever form it takes, it must be valid to the subject concerned. "In the destructive element immerse"⁸ counsels Stein, and the advice carries the same import. Romantic or ethical, the illusion must be upheld, except that the supreme paradox qualifies it, tragically: "We live, as we dream -- alone . . ."⁹

CONCLUSION

To reiterate, illusions are lies basically. As Hillis Miller says, "All human ideals, even the ideal of fidelity, are lies. They are lies in the sense that they are human fabrications. They derive from man himself and are supported by nothing outside him. There is a gap between man and the world, and what remains isolated within the human realm is illusory and insubstantial."¹ The critic is not expressing a new idea, but one germane to many of Conrad's works. The severance of man from his environment, from his fellow men and from himself is a gnawing concern which permits no mitigation. This severance is paralleled by the narrative technique, the use of multiple view-points which accentuates a gap in knowledge or comprehension. A convincing case can be made and has been made concerning the use of multiple view-points which circumvent, enrich and educate. The philosophical implications of such a method are easily discernible. Simply stated, there is no one or final view, and Marlow, or whoever the narrator, can only shift, under authorial direction, to present as many angles, as many nuances as possible. There is no object, only the interpretation of it. Our comprehension of characters, of states of affairs is finally subject to our own point of view, and our search for any ultimate or absolute truth must certainly be a failure.

Wayne Booth in his comprehensive investigation of the techniques of the novel is not inclined to take a lenient view of novelists who are ambiguous about their moral positions. Although he is careful to qualify himself, he still demands that "an author has an obligation to be as clear about his moral position as he can possibly

be."² Narrative versatility is often reflective of a nihilistic vision, on which Booth comments:

In a work of this kind, not only would the narrator and reader move together through the unanswered questions as they arise, but presumably the implied author would move with them; no one could be the wiser for having read the book. The author of such a work must leave the action unresolved: any resolution would imply a standard of values in relation to which one situation would be more nearly final than another. Only an unresolved sense of meaningless continuation could do justice to a full nihilism of this kind.³

True enough, Conrad is often equivocal and ambiguous about his moral positions, as if unable to give any final answer. However, he is not irresponsible nor does he aim to mislead, but rather he directs the reader through the confusing labyrinths of existence. He leaves the action unresolved, but he is not a nihilist. Rather he awakens awareness of the imperfectability of communication, of the dishonesty of unequivocally stating a moral position when it is more vital and human to seek that position. In spite of all, there is a possibility of integration, of co-ordinating the meaningless pieces: "The mind of man is capable of anything -- because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future."⁴

The ambiguity in Conrad's orientation, which has not been emphasized in this thesis, is well crystallized in the fairly early work, the Nigger of the "Narcissus", examined in the last chapter. Conrad's philosophic orientation or lack of one is at times taken for confusion or the inability to conceptualize a philosophic position. Critics like Vernon Young have lambasted him for his "insecurities of orientation, possibly inspired by the modulations of Conrad's health."⁵ Hewitt, too, is sorely irritated by Conrad's lack of consistency,

noticing that the novels are disturbing and inconclusive; he also notes that the author's solution, his peace of mind is achieved through his turning away from these preoccupations.⁶ It is neither new nor strange for these remarks to be made for they point to most flagrant inconsistencies which prompt the author to avow, at moments, an ethic of fidelity which is undermined by the skepticism and pessimism found through the length and breadth of his canon.

Though the subject has almost been exhausted, having elicited so much attention and irritation, it is necessary to perceive the implications of the alleged confusion, especially when verbal and thematic recognition is accorded by Conrad to the concept of fidelity as enshrined in the seaman's code in many of his works. The theme of betrayal of the community, of infidelity to a code of ethics underlies major works like Lord Jim, Heart of Darkness, Almayer's Folly, while the ideal of brotherhood is implied and reiterated. Nonetheless, Conrad's statements on this subject are grossly simple if not downright misleading as when he says in the preface to A Personal Record: "Those who read me know my conviction that ^{the world,} the temporal world, rests on a few very simple ideas; so simple that they must be ^{as} old as the hills. It rests notably, amongst others, on the idea of Fidelity."⁷ In the same vein, he speaks of the code of the seaman, courage, loyalty and fidelity: "For the great mass of mankind the only saving grace that is needed is steady fidelity to what is nearest to hand and heart in the short moment of each human effort."⁸ These unequivocal statements must have been made in moments of supreme confidence, when the gnawing skepticism which had always plagued the man making him disagreeable, morbid, depressive, if not somewhat neurotic, was temporarily brushed

aside. In the same volume, A Personal Record, he presents conflicting evidence when his disavowal of an ethical universe is no less adamant: "The ethical view of the universe involves us at last in so many cruel and absurd contradictions, where the last vestiges of faith, hope, charity, and even reason itself, seem ready to perish, that I have come to suspect that the aim of creation cannot be ethical at all."⁹ Indeed such a direct statement only serves to buttress a firmly established orientation. Perhaps the ^{crux} ~~nexus~~ of the contradiction, which finally is also the epiphany, unravels itself when the same writer denounces what he calls "moral Nihilism," which usually breeds arrogance:

What one feels so hopelessly barren in declared pessimism is just its arrogance. It seems as if the discovery made by many men at various times that there is much evil in the world were a source of proud and unholy joy unto some of the modern writers. That frame of mind is not the proper one in which to approach seriously the art of fiction. It gives an author -- ¹⁰ goodness only knows why -- an elated sense of his own superiority.

Based only on superficial evidence, Conrad may be seen as an erratic author, but viewed within the complexity of his works, the contradictions are necessary. Conrad's pessimism is not total nor is he supremely arrogant; he is not like an arrogant James Wait, who "had surveyed all the vastness of human folly and had made up his mind not to be too hard on it" (18). Unlike the skeptic Heyst, he is not absolutely detached from existence, although he does see it pervaded by darkness, ignorance and at times, despair. The inability to comprehend all of existence, to find a meaning in it, necessitates the maintenance of sustaining illusions like fidelity, for the alternative, moral chaos, is even more intolerable to Conrad.

It has been remarked that Conrad's heroes do not seek being

and total function, but all are in quest of moral identity: "They seek final gratification through notions of self, never through expression of self."¹¹ It would be possible to argue that since Conrad is indeed preoccupied with ethical and moral notions it is inevitable that he places his characters in moral situations. The existence of Lord Jim, Razumov, Lingard and even Kurtz attests to the validity of the assertion though it must be recalled that the situation is never purely a moral one. However, if morality here is taken to include "notions of self," a sense of identity, then the critic has laid his finger on one of the most crucial conceptions of Conrad. The hero is not indeed wholly capable of being or total function because frequently he is yet to know his own identity. Being for him is not possible if it means self-expression without reference to the external universe. The crux of the matter lies in the hero's self-consciousness, for the chance of fulfillment is minimal unless it can somehow be related to the enigma external to him. Conrad's characters are indeed self-conscious for they are always seeking their psychological, moral and metaphysical identity. All try to arrive at a notion of self, for the simple reason that more often than not, they are dislocated, rootless beings seeking identification with or some link to the external universe. They are uprooted in all aspects, and the potency of their plight consists of the agony of their alienation. Perhaps Conrad does not conceive of them as beings with no conviction of their own reality or the reality of the universe. More often, the heroes are very much aware of their own reality, but it is the relation of the reality of the individual to the reality of the universe (moral, metaphysical) that poses the insoluble problem. The link, properly speaking,

must be provided by faith, but lacking that, a substitute has to be found, and that can take many forms. Since the gap cannot be bridged in rational consciousness, it is necessary if not imperative to sustain the illusions which help to maintain notions of self and bring them to fruition. The ambiguity or contradiction in Conrad, we have noticed, originates from the consciousness of the gap and the will to bridge it somehow. Although sometimes Conrad despairs of understanding this enigma, the mystery which lies around and beyond us, he does acknowledge it with a sort of perplexed appreciation. In a passage in A Personal Record he speaks of the spectacle which is the universe:

I would fondly believe that its [the universe's] object is purely spectacular: a spectacle for awe, love, adoration, or hate, if you like, but in this view -- and in this view alone -- never for despair! Those visions, delicious or poignant, are a moral end in themselves. The rest is our affair -- the laughter, the tears, the tenderness, the high tranquillity of a steeled heart, the detached curiosity of a subtle mind -- that's our affair!¹²

How fervently Conrad sought to avoid despair! And yet any piece of his biography would reveal his dismal and tortured existence. In a way his life can be seen as a quest to immortalize, for his own conviction, those sustaining illusions. His works are certainly characterized by emphasis on the need to keep them, though at the same time their ultimate validity is questioned. The debate on illusion and the perpetuation of a "lie" is carried on at length in Lord Jim. Stein sees the solution of Jim's case to lie in the maintenance of an illusion, Jim's concept of a romantic self. Jim's concept happens to be highly ethical, though solipsistic as well. The ideal of a heroic self is the one sustaining thing, a means of permitting Jim to connect with the world he knows, though ironically, he becomes physically and

socially dislocated in the process. The lack of an omniscient viewpoint in this novel, and the tentativeness of the conclusion naturally leave the whole affair suspended. Jim is admired and despised, his ideals glorified and denigrated, and we have suggestions of approval and condemnation. The significant point is that the reader is never totally immersed in Jim's illusion; the esthetic distance is always preserved, thanks to Marlow, with the result that the mystique of Jim's life and career is undermined and likewise his whole orientation. It is one thing to be immersed in an illusion and another to know that it is the illusion that is propelling us. And then of course, there are illusions and illusions. Kurtz's illusion, which is unlimited self-power, is destructive, not an ideal but a deception. The ideals in Conrad's universe are potentially therapeutic, and they preserve sanity, even though people see through them and discard them. These skeptics, Heyst for example, revel in their superior knowledge, but as we have seen, Heyst's skepticism is also an illusion, a facade by which he can abstain from activity. The danger of a vacuum is, however, too horrifying to contemplate. Martin Decoud fails to sustain illusions, and lacking these, he fails to grasp the reality of his own existence. Thus presented and examined, illusion is both upheld and undermined. The key to understanding this paradox is consciousness. Conrad is a conscious man like his narrators, sensitive to the nuances, reflexes, variations in tone and colour. As such he has to share with us his vision which has its darkness but also its patches of light. The fact is that Conrad never foists the ethical or metaphysical ideals on the reader; one suspects that he would not assimilate them into his own system either. The dubious affair of presenting a universe,

unilluminated by understanding, a race of men plagued by spiritual and moral incertitudes, and not least of all, guilt, while concomitantly upholding the alternatives of courage, fidelity, and even faith, is aimed at eventual revelation. Nothing in such a universe is unadulterated, so even our understanding must be contaminated by imperfection. The revelation gradually amounts to the heightening of one's consciousness, or as the author says in the now famed preface:

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel -- it is, before all, to make you see. That -- and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there according to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm -- all you demand -- and ¹³perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask.

That "glimpse of truth" is a gift that has yet to be bestowed. It would not be forthcoming at all if one were expecting a well-formulated final answer to all existence. Conrad is more interested in consciousness, in sharpening our tools of moral and intellectual perception, enabling us to see for ourselves the tragedy and the illusions, and to separate each from each.

FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION

- ¹Conrad, Under Western Eyes, 38.
- ²Conrad, Lord Jim, 69.
- ³Conrad, Victory, 199.
- ⁴*Ibid.*, 196.
- ⁵Aubry, Life and Letters, 226.
- ⁶*Ibid.*, 226.
- ⁷Conrad, Preface to Nigger of "Narcissus," viii.
- ⁸Conrad, A Personal Record, 13.
- ⁹Baines, Joseph Conrad, 442.
- ¹⁰Gillon, The Eternal Solitary, 134-135.

CHAPTER I

¹Conrad, Lord Jim, LONDON: Dent, 1935, 132. (All future references to Lord Jim are to this edition).

²Camus, Myth of Sisyphus, 13.

³Ibid., 21.

⁴Sartre, "Existentialism" from A Casebook on Existentialism, 278.

⁵Ibid., 282.

⁶Ibid., 279.

⁷Conrad, Heart of Darkness, 71.

CHAPTER II \

- ¹ed. Spanos, A Casebook on Existentialism, 2.
- ²Aubry, Life and Letters, 222.
- ³Ibid., 226.
- ⁴Ibid., 226.
- ⁵Hume, Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, 24.
- ⁶Ibid., 25.
- ⁷Ibid., 30.
- ⁸Ibid., 78.
- ⁹Conrad, Nostromo: A Tale of the Seaboard, London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1957, 198. (All quotations are from this edition)
- ¹⁰Conrad, Victory: An Island Tale, London: J.M. Dent and sons Ltd. 1948, 92. (All quotations are from this edition).
- ¹¹Ibid., 196.
- ¹²Conrad, Nostromo, 498.
- ¹³Conrad, Victory, 54.
- ¹⁴Rosenfield, Paradise of Snakes, 63.
- ¹⁵Warren, "Nostromo" in Art of Joseph Conrad, 218.

CHAPTER III

- ¹Fordham, An Introduction to Jung's Psychology, 48-9.
- ²Ibid., 50.
- ³Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, 218, 219.
- ⁴Ibid., 202.
- ⁵ed. Guerard, Stories of the Double, 2.
- ⁶Rank, Beyond Psychology, 81.
- ⁷Ibid., 82.
- ⁸Guerard, "The Journey within" in Harkness, Conrad's Secret Sharer, 68.
- ⁹Conrad, "The Secret Sharer" in 'Twixt Land and Sea, 104.
- ¹⁰Guerard, "The Journey Within", 68.
- ¹¹Palmer, Joseph Conrad's Fiction, 223-4.
- ¹²Yelton, Mimesis and Metaphor, 281.
- ¹³Conrad, The Shadow Line, 62.
- ¹⁴Ibid., x.
- ¹⁵Benson, "Two Stories", 87.
- ¹⁶Ibid., 87.
- ¹⁷Ibid., 93.
- ¹⁸Aubry, Life and Letters, 182.
- ¹⁹Guerard, "The Journey Within", 71.
- ²⁰Yetton, Mimesis, 301
- ²¹Benson, "Two Stories", 90.

CHAPTER IV

¹Miller, Poets of Reality, 3.

²Conrad, Preface to American edition of Nigger of the "Narcissus",

³Conrad, Nigger of the "Narcissus", London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1950, 37. (All future references are to this edition.)

⁴Ibid., 31.

⁵Conrad, Preface to "Narcissus", viii.

⁶Conrad, Heart of Darkness, 39.

⁷Ibid., 41.

⁸Conrad, Lord Jim, 156.

⁹Conrad, Heart of Darkness, 38.

CONCLUSION

- ¹Miller, Poets of Reality, 17.
- ²Booth, Rhetoric of Fiction, 389.
- ³Ibid., 297.
- ⁴Conrad, Heart of Darkness, 52.
- ⁵Young, "Outline for Reconsideration", 12.
- ⁶Hewitt, Conrad: A Reassessment, 77.
- ⁷Conrad, Personal Record, 19.
- ⁸Conrad, Notes on Life and Letters, 257.
- ⁹Conrad, Personal Record, 177.
- ¹⁰Conrad, Notes on Life and Letters, 3710.
- ¹¹Young, "Outline", 14.
- ¹²Conrad, Personal Record, 177.
- ¹³Conrad, Preface to Nigger of the "Narcissus", x.

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